Wanderers' Library

The Wanderer's Library is a collaborative fiction exercise. It's a collection of stories that explore strange and fantastic corners of the world, hidden from ordinary eyes. Some of the stories take place in the distant past, taking the form of legends and fables. Others are from the modern day, hiding in the shadows just out of sight. The basic premise is that there are strange things that are not quite of our world. Some are dangerous, some are merely fascinating. They are all in some respect extraordinary.

A big game hunter searches for hunting in other worlds.

A creature lives in alleyways and junkyards, collecting bits of trash to disguise itself.

A red thing of many parts promises everything you have ever wanted.

Stories here should try to evoke a Sense of Wonder, a sense that there is a larger world beyond the one we know. In the world of the Library, these wonders are hidden, but never truly far away. But never forget that this is a wilder world than our own, and it's never entirely safe, either. Tread with care.

This book contains the collected works of the Wanderers' Library, a collaborative fiction writing website. All contents are licensed under the CC-BY-SA 3.0 license. The stories comprising the book are available online at wanderers-library.wikidot.com .

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Wanderers' Library

Ebook edition

The Library

The Archives

A Day In The Life Of Dr. Griffon

Water dripped from the faucet, falling into a stone bowl. Moss, pulsating with each drip, covered the bowl; and the bowl itself was made of moss, fossilized. A middle-aged man, his hair thin and grey, sat across from it, staring. He was the only one awake, and one of the few individuals who was even at the facility.

His name was Robert Griffon, and he was very bored--a side effect of being in a Spartan, nearly windowless room. Coyotes sang outside, which under other circumstances might have provided some comfort. But there was something… off… about the sounds. Something different. He'd, if he could have, analyzed the sounds. Anything to distract from the horrendous boredom. He couldn't, of course. He hadn't bothered to read up on coyote sociodynamics. Instead, he re-examined the form for the shipment of replacement window panes. He'd gone over it twice already, and he knew he hadn't missed anything—after all, *he* couldn't, but it wasn't like he had anything better to do. Again he cursed his so-called 'gift'. He couldn't sleep, he couldn't interact socially without having frequent seizures, he lived his whole life almost completely alone.

Anomaly appears to be a geological organism. Suggest using as paperweight, he wrote on a notepad. *The only particularly interesting thing is that part of it is not composed of rock and that it pulses.* Griffon flicked a button next to him and a pane of light shimmered into existence in front of him. "Species identification, please." While Cognitio extracted a DNA sample, Griffon turned to the next item he was supposed to inventory. It was a tiny globe, much similar to any of the various antique globes one could find in stereotypical dusty old libraries. The only significant difference was that it was floating, and slowly rotating.

He tossed the globe halfway across the room, adjusting his throw so it would come to a stop in the middle of the room. Without looking, he knew that he had missed.

“The species is *Takakia lepidoziodes*.” Griffon recorded it, then tore off the notepad page and placed it, along with the organism, in a shoebox. “The rest of the anomolies waiting to go through processing will arrive by pneumatic tube. ETA five minutes.”

Griffon snorted lightly and idly worked on a theory of quantum gravity. As he did he ate yet another protein bar. The gnawing hunger that always plagued him--another result of his 'gift’--was getting intolerable.

“Music, please. Something ambient.” The computer complied. Rather unsurprisingly, the music was rather gloomy. Griffon changed a few values of various properties of force-carrying particles, and as usual failed to produce an answer that didn’t involve planets flying apart. Combining that with a multidimensional approach yielded promising results, however—though he’d have to look into them later, since the capsule arrived just then. Griffon peered in. One bright red fern inside a tiny Bell chamber, several test tubes filled with a curious glowing substance, a glass sphere holding a tiny rainforest, and an golden eyeball with twenty writhing optic nerves. Griffon removed each of them and immediately focused on the eyeball.

“Begin recording.” He turned the eyeball in his hand. “Play recovery notes.”

“The anomaly was purchased in a bazaar in Morroco while I was on vacation for the equivalent of three hundred seventy-nine dollars,” said Valeria’s voice, played by the computer. Griffon concentrated, and a lens mounted to a headband flipped down in front of his right eye. “The dealer claimed it was the eye of a dragon… though I doubt that, since it doesn’t seem to be reptilian in nature—it looks almost canine—and all known draconoforms are. From the nature of the optic nerves I presume it’s meant to go in an empty eye socket, though of course I’ve failed to find any volunteers.”

Griffon attached an alligator clip to one of the eyeball’s tendrils, which he had long ago sedated with an aerosolized tranquilizer. The alligator clip was in turn attached to a wire, which ran for a few meters before having been inserted into a data port. Several other

similar wires were already attached. The screen was blank, of course; the eye wasn't transmitting any information. It had taken him an hour to figure out what algorithm to use to convert the bioelectrical signals into something the computer could understand, and he was rather satisfied with that accomplishment. The eye twitched, and Griffon lightly misted it again with tranquilizer, then quickly finished attaching the alligator clips.

When the eye came out of the the trance, it immediately spun around and stared at its own tendrils. Griffon was suddenly very glad he had used Type 8 alligator clips; cold hard metal would infuriate the eyeball. "Please listen very carefully to me," he said, pressing a finger to a tiny pendant around his neck that would, hopefully, enable the eyeball to understand him. "You are in Arizona."

The eye moved to staring at him.

"We are in a facility built on top of a dimensional anomaly. Please nod if you are sapient."

The eye stared at him, but did not nod.

"Eyeball does not become sapient once connected to a tool it can use to transmit information. Responds to sound." Just to make sure, Griffon ran a small wand-like device over the eyeball and checked the reading. "Sapience sensors confirm lack of sapience. Beginning testing. Standard electromagnetic spectrum test coupled with standard testing for anomalous sensors."

Visible, infrared, and ultraviolet were not surprises. X-rays, lifesigns, and beta radiation were mildly unusual, but nothing particularly exceptional. What was exceptional was the presence of what seemed to be some sort of anomaly detection system. When Griffon panned the eye's field of vision over himself, he found that it showed him surrounded in what were three-dimensional fractals. The red fern was surrounded by an aura of raging flame, the sphere pulsed with dim white light, and the moss bowl was surrounded by motes of green light. The vials of glowing substance were only surrounded by the exact same light they had shown without anything but the naked eye, which, given that only their origin seemed to be anomalous,

was expected.

“Recommend using in the Observor drone. Yes, I know that’s my pet project, but that’s not the reasoning. Since the Observor drone is intended to be used for studying anomalous wildlife, something that can spot anomalous wildlife, even shapeshifters, out of large groups of wildlife, would be enormously useful to its mission. And, for the record, I *can’t* reverse engineer it, that is why it is *anomalous*. So don’t bother asking.”

Griffon removed the eyeball from the alligator clips and returned it to a vat of mildly salty water, then turned to the red fern. “Cognitio,” he said, “extract a DNA sample…"

All Power To The Soviets

When Yevgeny Saltykov and Fedot Katin argued, the world argued alongside them. The air always seemed to agree with Yevengy, responding with great swirling currents when he made an emphatic point or with a meek draft when he was reduced to an *ad hominen*. Fedot, though, always had the ear of the ground. Angles became more angular, distances became more distant, and the snow became more frigid when he shouted. As the two of them walked to the meeting through the snow, the earth and the air were locked in a pitched battle.

Everyone was so engaged in the debate that they didn't notice the car moving slowly just behind them.

"You know the histories as well as I do," Yevgeny cried. "Novgorod fell and so did the Black Market! People said the *exact same thing* you're carrying on about! 'Oh no, the last gasps of Russian freedom, dead! The world is ended!' And nothing changed! The Earth still turned, the sun still rose! We continued as we always had! You're being too romantic!" The wind blew a gust of flakes at the two men, halfway blinding the pair.

As Yevgeny brushed the snow from his eyes, Fedot swept his arms around the scene. "This, though!? This is insanity! They're talking about worldwide revolution. How, when they're done, there won't be any classes. There won't even be Russians or Poles or Germans. Just a sludge of humanity. What magic is there in that!?" The sidewalk seemed to creak with indignation at the thought.

Yevgeny rolled his eyes. "Maybe your imagination is just lacking. Change is the only constant. If you can't adapt to the times, then perhaps…" He trailed off. The wind became a low breeze, and Yevgeny's features settled into a mocking smile. The fact that this was Yevgeny's neutral expression didn't make it any less infuriating for Fedot.

Fedot felt the anger at Yevgeny and his smug airs leap through his guts. For a moment, he considered trying to win the discussion by pointing out that ever since the revolution, he had heard *words* behind closed doors. *Words* about Yevgeny and others like him, who were seen as too friendly, too likely to flip to the new ways. About whether, well… and then he would leave it at that.

But no, things had been said in confidence that could not be said elsewhere. He simply fumed. The ice seemed to get more slippery as they walked.

The pair continued walking in silence. Only when the wind died down altogether did they hear the rumble of the motor behind them. They paid it no mind until it followed them for a second block, then a third.

A man in a thick coat, bundled up to his eyes, sat in the front seat. Even mostly covered, the man looked immensely serious, and quite large. In the back seat, a pudgy man in a rumpled suit stared at Yevgeny. When the man saw him look up, he smiled. Yevengy stopped. So did the car. Fedot continued to walk for a few more steps before realizing he was leaving everyone else behind.

Yevgeny walked up to the car and tapped on the window with his left hand. "Can we help you, friend?" he called through the glass. Fedot put his hand in his pocket and felt for the piece of dead man's string. He didn't like the situation, but feeling the fibers between his fingers calmed him somewhat.

The fat man opened the door of the car and stepped out. Fedot stepped back. Without taking his eyes off of Yevegny, the man began speak.

"Greetings comrades. You are Saltykov, Yevgeny Ivanovich, are you not?" *Comrades*. The past months had taught Fedot to hate that word, and all those who spoke it.

Yevgeny opened his mouth to reply, but Fedot got there first. "What business is it of yours, fatty? We're just two citizens going about our business," he said. He hoped that the contempt was sufficiently evident in his voice.

Fedot had been jostled, mocked, and harassed by low-life dullards like this. Idiots without a speck of breeding, too arrogant to know their place. Like Andrei Vasilievich, the chimney-sweep's son who had the gall to call himself a "magician." This man was doubtless some High Soviet Komissariat Poobah In Charge Of Widget Manufacture or somesuch, a new title that carried no heft. Not like "count" did. Or at least, had.

It was time that one of the faceless goons' own learn their place. Fedot smiled. Nothing too bad. Maybe just tip the car over on its side when the fat dullard escalated the situation.

But the fat dullard did not escalate the situation. Instead he kept his eyes on Yevgeny, a smile playing around his lips. "Come, Comrade Saltykov. We have much to talk about. Leave your companion."

Yevgeny nodded. A perpetual nodder, he nodded when he considered things. He had nodded when Lazar asked him for a small loan, just five hundred rubles, until next week. He nodded when the demon in the form of a sour-faced babushka had asked him his True Name. And he nodded now, when he was going to tell the man where to stick his discussion.

But Fedot saw only the nod and the mocking smile. He saw the betrayal of Yevgeny, and those like him. He saw the triumph of ill-bred shits like the man in the car. He saw red.

"The hell you are!" he roared. His face twisted with rage. The sidewalk became so cold that it sucked the heat from everyone standing on it, creating a sheet of ice that bound them to the ground. "I'll kill you first, you little cu—"

There was a loud "pop" and Fedot's head jerked back. The right side of his face burst outward, spraying Yevgeny and the car with blood. He slumped down, his fingers twitching. The ground sighed and regained some of its warmth. A man emerged from an alleyway, a pistol in his hand.

The man gave a smile as tight as catgut. "Now, Yevgeny Ivanovich Saltykov, the time for requests is over. Come with us. We have much to discuss."

Yevgeny nodded. "I-I… I have a meeting," he said quietly as he tried not to look at Fedot.

The pudgy man moved to the left side of the car, making room for Yevgeny and the man from the alley. Yevgeny felt the gun barrel prodding him in the back when he hesitated. The man in the front seat got out and picked up Fedot's body like it was a baby bird. The man disappeared into the alley carrying Fedot's body. A moment later, he climbed back into the front seat.

"I'm afraid you'll have to miss your meeting, Comrade Saltykov," the pudgy man said as Yevgeny sat next to him. He didn't look at Yevgeny. The bundled giant joined his twin in the front seat, and the car sped off. "We require a few minutes of your time. Just some routine questioning."

"What for?"

The pudgy man stared straight ahead. "Yevgeny Ivanovich Saltykov. Member of the bourgeois class, noted wastrel about Petrograd." A smile played at the pudgy man's lips and he turned his head to face Yevgeny. "Member of the Mystical Brotherhood of St. Petersburg, and wizard."

The car sped off into the cold January evening, spraying slush from its wheels.

In a well-appointed room crammed full of books and knowledge, the magicians were getting impatient.

The room was mostly empty, as lectures tended to be poorly-attended. The weather hadn't helped, nor had the fact that it was Katin, better known as "Fuckface" behind his back, who was lecturing. However, even the most esoteric subjects by the most irascible members used to have a dozen or so attendees.

The fact was, since last February, the lay of the land had been constantly shifting. First the Tsar had no longer been a tsar, and there was a government of the people. Then there was no longer a government of the people but a government of the soviets. Then

Russia had begun to tear itself apart in a civil war.

In America, it was said that magic thrived on chaos like this, eagerly drinking up the change. But three centuries of rule by the same family had given the wizards and magicians of Russia a certain amount of conservatism. With the situation radically changing week to week, they were antsy. That most of those in the magical societies of Russia were aristocrats or landowners did little to calm the situation.

Sofiya stared into the snow outside as the tea cup she held cycled between blistering heat and icy cold every few seconds, drumming her eight fingers on the side of the delicate china. Maxim half-heartedly argued with Nikolai about the size of the Ravelwoods. Igor chewed on his fingers, which he had bought just last month.

"Where in the hell is he?" Olga muttered. She was an older woman, with a face that drew to a pinched point centered at her nose. Her hair was drawn into a tight bun. She paced back and forth parallel to the windows.

Andrei stood in the corner, leafing through a book on the thaumaturgical properties of honey bees. He looked up and slid the book back into its spot on the shelf. If he could get a rise out of Olga, it would be ten times better than whatever fool presentation Fedot was going to give.

He took his pocket watch from his jacket and made a show of opening it. "I wonder where Fedot and Yevgeny are. It's not in them to be late like this. Well, Yevgeny, maybe… You don't suppose he—no, he wouldn't."

Olga shook her head. "With Yevgeny, it's always something. 'Oh, I couldn't find my boots!' 'Oh, my alarm didn't go off!' 'Oh, I was in a world without sun!' But Fedot is always here on time."

Andrei sighed. If she wouldn't take the bait now, she wouldn't ever take it. What a disappointing blow up. He turned to Igor.

"Did you hear about Ivan? The shopkeeper, I mean. They seized his store and said that he was a petite bourgeois or somesuch. Not as

much eye of newt for you anymore, eh?"

Igor continued to chew at his fingers. "I said…" Andrei repeated.

Sofiya glared at him. "No outside business in the chamber," she said.

Andrei grumbled under his breath. The Mystical Brotherhood had plenty of strange rules regarding procedure, but that was one that always irked him the most. They acted as though the chamber was some sacrosanct *thing*, disconnected from the rest of the world, while half of the magicians drew their power from the very strength of Russia itself. Lousy hypocrites.

There was a commotion downstairs. There was a loud bang of the doors, followed by muffled shouting from Sergei, who watched the entrance. There was a pause as someone replied. Then the sounds of a group making their way up the stairs.

Everyone in the room looked at one another, unsure of how to proceed. The doors were supposed to be impenetrable to anyone outside the Brotherhood. Indeed, the building itself was enchanted to escape notice from outsiders.

The doors to the chamber burst open, revealing a rotund man in glasses with a briefcase. A moment later, a group of at least twenty poorly-dressed and well-armed men moved in from behind him, spreading around the room. The eyes of the young men flicked from person to person in the room, daring them to move. No one did. For a moment, all was still.

The fat man broke the silence. "Greetings, comrades. This is the meeting place of the Mystical Brotherhood, is it not?"

The magicians exchanged looks, but none said anything. The fat man adjusted his glasses and repeated himself. "This is Chelyadnin Hall, correct? And you all are the Mystical Brotherhood of Petersburg, are you not?"

Maxim looked at the man. "We are. And who might you be? The last thing to break into the Hall like that was a demon of the highest

order."

The fat man smiled and shook his head. "I am no demon, comrade. However, I don't feel that it's time for you to know my name just yet. You may just call me Comrade Roman. Who I am is of little importance at the moment. Who I represent, though…" He wagged his finger. "…is much more important. I represent the people and the working masses of Soviet Russia."

Andrei felt he had to tear the question out of himself. There was no good answer to this, but maybe, just maybe, if the fat man had the wrong idea, they could bluff their way out. Things were changing, and maybe the change was inevitable. But not having guns waved in one's face took temporary precedent over everything else. "So, what do revolutionaries want with a club devoted to reading old mystic texts?" he said.

Comrade Roman chuckled. It was dry and soft, like rotted wood. "Well, if that was all that you did, comrade, we would have little use for you. But listen, your friend, Yevgeny Ivanovich, told us all about you. The way that you work wonders, your rivalry with the other societies, the, ah, duel in Siberia.

"You've lived in your decadent ways for longer than anyone can remember, feeding like ticks while the peasant and the worker labored around you. Your ways, both as a class and a discipline, are dying. The world is ready for revolution, a new leap into an era of equality and progress. The only question is: can you make yourselves relevant in this new world? Or will you choose to be cast into the dust heap of history like serfdom or the gods?"

The dissonance was making Andrei's head hurt. Great speeches of worlds yet to come and irrevocable changes usually came from grandiose wizards or else from printed polemics, where he could imagine the speakers as properly magnificent. But here was a man, one whom Andrei might have normally not noticed on the street, speaking of a brave new world, telling the wizards of Petrograd that they must join or die. He wondered if this was some very elaborate, very unfunny joke.

As Andrei wondered, Nikolai stood up. "What in God's name are you

talking about, sir?" he said. He did his best to keep his shoulders steady, but from where Andrei was standing, it was obvious that he was shaking.

Comrade Roman smiled. "What I am talking about, comrade, is you turning your talents in the unexplained sciences towards the cause of the communist revolution. I'm talking about turning away from romantic notions of wonder and magic and giving yourselves over fully to the ways of science and Marxism. There is so much potential in this room alone, to say nothing of Russia as a whole. The societies of Moscow and Kazan have already joined."

"Just the few of us in this room could destroy you five times over, ant," Maxim said. He didn't even bother to look at Comrade Roman.

"Yes, you could. And maybe all of the men in this room as well." Roman gestured to the gunmen surrounding him. The gunmen stared ahead. "But it is not a question of *if*, but *when* you would be overrun. Then, of course, all of you would be executed. The rest of your society would be hunted down and shot like dogs, never knowing why this was happening. Your library would be burned, to serve as an example for others. In that way, no one benefits."

As soon as the gunmen had entered, everyone knew that this was the case, but hearing it out loud made it real. Maxim deflated, and the magicians looked to one another.

"And if we accept? If we join, what then?" Andrei asked.

"Then your society will be dissolved and you will be inducted into the government of the Soviets as, ahem, *applied scientists*. You will be put to work, sharing your gifts with the world. No longer will you be allowed to selfishly hoard your knowledge." Roman placed the briefcase upon the podium.

Maxim stood up, puffed with indignation yet again. "Disso— no! The Mystical Brotherhood of St. Petersburg has stood for over two hundred years! There is a power woven into the very name of the society!"

Roman shrugged. "Funny, that's what was said about the

Romanovs. Your ways are finished, comrades. The best that can be hoped for is creative destruction." Maxim slumped.

Andrei looked to the other magicians. Maxim refused to meet his eyes. Nikolai gave a slight nod. Olga and Igor shrugged. What else was there to do? In older times, maybe they could have taken refuge with the Library, but the time that they would be welcome, or even allowed in the Grand Library, had long since passed. The other societies were turning their backs on the old ways, too.

Besides, hadn't this been just what he had wanted? No more pretending that the outside world didn't exist? In his younger days, before he had given himself fully to magic, Andrei could have been one of the squirrely-eyed gunmen, seeking to do away with old things that existed for their own sake.

"We'll be protected, yes?" Andrei asked.

"Absolutely. The revolution looks after its own," Roman said.

"Then we'll accept. The other members of our group, though… I don't know if they'd be as willing."

"We will address that later. Now, you are the only members of the Mystical Brotherhood of St. Petersburg in the library. Your signatures are all that matter." Roman opened the briefcase and took out a sheet of paper. Andrei and the others moved towards him.

A sound like a gunshot rang out. Andrei jumped and searched the room for the source.

Before he could locate it, he heard the cocking of a dozen rifles. He turned and saw all the weapons were pointed at Sofiya. In her hands were the shattered remains of the teacup. The tea that had fallen in her lap steamed into a brief cloud. She mumbled something that no one could hear. The fat man's smile slipped a little.

Sofiya spoke up, saying the same words as before. "That's it, then?" She stared at the remnants of the cup.

Flames suddenly engulfed her hands, causing the delicate paint to

run in thin rivers of gold down the side of what remained of the tea cup. She seemed not to notice. The gunmen cocked their weapons, but the fat man waved them down. Sofiya stood up.

Olga spoke, trying to maintain an even voice. "Sofa, don't—"

"Two hundred years, Olga. Two hundred years we've stood. And we had two simple rules. No outside business in. No inside business out!" She held up her fiery left hand, its three fingers visible through the flames. "Or did you think I'd forgotten that?

"Sofiya, please, listen to me," Andrei began. He hoped that his voice was reassuring and didn't waver too much. "Things have changed. We have to change with them if we want to survive."

Sofiya's expression remained neutral as Andrei talked. However, the flames around her hands began to grow, and within seconds they were eating away at the sleeves of her dress. She looked to the assembled members of the Brotherhood. "Is that what you all see, too? The world changes and we change with it? To hell with principles or dignity?"

The other members refused to meet her eyes. "Sofa, please. We-" Olga began.

Sofiya held up a fiery finger to her lips, hushing the old woman. "Olga, it's fine," she said.

She turned to face Andrei. The air around her began to ripple with heat and all over her clothes, burn marks first appeared then spread. "I've always hated you, Andrei Vasilievich," she said. With a cry, she lunged at him, burning hands swinging at his head.

Andrei ducked out of the way a split second before the hands came down. He rolled to the right, ending up on his back a few feet to the right of Sofiya. Bits of her skin were beginning to char as well.

In the back of his mind, he recognized the sound of gunshots. But Sofiya didn't react to them in any way. Probably some barrier keeping them at bay, at least for now.

Andrei fumbled for a spell, a witty comment, something. But his mind

was empty. All there was room for was animal panic. He tried to get to his feet, far away from the fiery witch, but his joints refused to cooperate. Any second, she would burn him to a cinder.

But her attention was on the wall. Sofiya mumbled something, and suddenly, the ceiling-high bookcase burst into white-hot flames. Hundreds of years and millions of words worth of spells and other information began to curl, then burn in the heat. The sounds of screaming, of gun shots, and of burning wood and paper all competed to overpower one another.

"My God, what are you doing!?" one of the magicians (Nikolai? Andrei thought, maybe Igor?) shouted. The flames began to spread to the walls.

"If the Brotherhood must die, let it die properly! Let the new world mean new knowledge!" Sofiya shouted above the din. She no longer looked anything like the serious, reedy woman Andrei had once known. Now she was nothing but fire, everything about her having been consumed in the blaze.

"We have to leave!" Roman shouted, grabbing Andrei by the shoulder. The other magicians were already making a hasty retreat. A normal fire this size could have easily been dealt with by one or two of them. But a magical fire, from an infuriated fire specialist, determined to bring down the Brotherhood with her, was too much for any of them to handle, and they all knew it.

Parts of the ceiling began to fall, one landing a few feet away from Andrei. The pillar of flame where Sofiya had once stood made no move towards them. The falling plaster finally brought Andrei to his senses and he dashed outside, following Roman.

As he ran, he turned his head to see if Sofiya was following them. Later, he would tell himself that it was just a trick of the light or the heat. Surely, the amount of adrenaline running through his system, combined with the destruction of all of this knowledge, must have created an illusion. But at that moment, he could swear that he saw the column of fire smile at him.

Outside, the small group gathered on the side of the road opposite

the burning building. The flame didn't appear to be spreading to the other buildings on the block, so at least there was that.

Igor and Olga slumped down, sitting against the cool stones of the building. Nikolai began to pace, while Maxim counted the handful of books he had been able to gather before they caught. Andrei stood in a daze, looking up at the building as it began to collapse in on itself.

"All those books. All that truth. Gone," he said. He wasn't speaking to anyone in particular, and no one in particular paid him any mind.

Roman cleared his throat. "Excuse me, comrades. I think that it is best if we get stock of the situation. Hopefully, soon there will be a fire wagon coming by to deal with the issue," he said. He pulled the briefcase up to his chest and opened it, removing several papers. Andrei sighed. Of course. Of all of the damn things to survive the fire, it had to be the briefcase.

"However," Roman continued, "there is still some business left to attend to. If you could sign this agreement, as we had discussed, you may be on your way."

"Now!?" Maxim asked, "You want us to sign that damn thing now!?"

"I honestly cannot think of a better time than now," Roman said. He pushed the papers towards Andrei.

Andrei sighed and signed the documents. He was too tired, after all of that, to even read it. He passed it to Igor, who did the same. The magicians passed it to one another, and the document was quickly filled. Olga was the last to the paper. After she signed it, Andrei felt a curious lightness on the top of his head. Looking around, he knew that everyone else in the group, and all of the other magicians in Petrograd, felt it too.

That was how, with less than one-tenth of its membership present, the Mystical Brotherhood of St. Petersburg dissolved itself.

Business Letter

Hey, L, I got your letter. Yeah, I'm not too worried about the SeCoPro. They're still digging at the old place. Psychology of the individual, man. They're like cats. You run, they're gonna chase you. But if they see something else moving, that's where their eyes are, leaving you to jet. The tail? Yeah, he's fine. He's designed for this shit, man. And it's not like he's really there or anything. They get wise, we pull the plug and get away free and clear.

Anyway, I got some new toys I come up with. Robots the size of fleas. They grab onto a guy, get carried wherever. They record what they see and hear, leave with whoever, and detach where you need 'em. No signal to trace, because they don't broadcast. You get it all when you collect them. Figure it'll be useful for that project of yours. I know, not your usual style, but get with the times, man.

If you'd care to join me in the 22nd century, leave payment in the usual place. Ask Schitz if you don't remember.

And please, man, let me take a look at that hat. I just *know* I can make it better. You could have goddamned lasers firing off your head. Think about it.

V

Communion

A play in one act

Our story is set in the Cave of Other, a place where those seeking enlightenment come to pray. The only lighting is a single lantern hanging from the ceiling, which casts flickering shadows on the walls. Painted on them are drawings of various scenes, ranging from crude stick figures hunting an animal to a beautiful maiden sitting by a stream. Carved out stone at the back of a cave is a sample altar with runes engraved on it. No one knows who built this place, or how, but it has been here for as long as anyone can remember. To normal eyes it is an ordinary cave. But if you follow the right map, it will reveal its secrets.

A man enters the cave. He's large and powerfully built, dressed in a simple brown robe. His hair and beard are long and ungroomed. Like all who come to the Cave of Other, he is a troubled man, with much to atone for. Here he hopes to find both enlightenment and the path of forgiveness. He kneels in front of the altar, and from his robe pulls a small vial of yellow liquid.

MAN: Oh great Goddess of the Earth, I wish for audience with thee. I come as your humble servant, and as a sacrifice give you my dreams. Do with them what you see fit.

He uncorks the bottle, bows his head, and pours the contents of the bottle on the altar. After this he stands and waits.

MAN: Oh Goddess, please hear my prayer! I have traveled many hundreds of miles to speak with thee. I have braved the mountains of Himalaya and the blizzards of Siberia all for your word and never have I rested in a place built by Man or traveled in his vehicles. I have heard this caves brings enlightenment, and enlightenment is what I require.

GODDESS (off stage): Then you may have it.

The goddess walks in from stage right. Today she's taken the form of a beautiful woman, with long brown hair and sharp blue eyes. Braided into her hair are vines, and her feet are caked with wet mud. Two ram horns emerge from her forehead and curl back. She's dressed plainly, in a light grey gown flecked with dirt.

GODDESS: Why have you come to me? What do you seek that requires audience with the Goddess of the Earth?

MAN (bowing in reverence): Goddess, I have found myself lost in the world, and to regain my bearings.

She considers this.

GODDESS: My counseling is not to be taken lightly. Many find it difficult to accept the truths I offer. Unless you are willing to hear what you do not wish to, I would recommend you return to your home, and put thoughts of enlightenment aside. Knowing this, you may ask three questions of me, and no more. Choose them wisely.

MAN: You are too kind Goddess. My first question is simple. Many years ago, I worked for an organization who committed terrible deeds to prevent worse ones from transpiring, which I assume you are aware of. Since leaving that organization, the atrocities I have committed rest heavy on my mind. Tell me, Goddess, what can I do to cleanse my spirit of my sins?

GODDESS (sighing): I am sorry, but your spirit is forever tainted. Your actions were born out of necessity, true, but the gods are not quick to forgive even then. The most you can strive for is to work to color your soul with kindness, and hope it is enough to outweigh what you have done.

MAN (nods): I see. Thank you for your frank reply. My second question is this. Since leaving that organization I have wandered the earth in an attempt to find a man I once wronged while working for them, who I assumed you know of. Where can I find this man?

GODDESS: The man you seek lives in the city of Hamburg,

Germany, and does not wish to be found. What you did to him is not something he can forgive. If you truly want to help him, leave him where he is, with his family. It is not your place to meddle further in his life.

The man is silent for several moments before speaking again. This answer has greatly disturbed him.

MAN: Then I have a final question. In my lifetime, I have seen horrible things, things that threaten the foundation of life itself. I have come to realize that humanity is a very, very small thing when compared to the rest of the universe, and those who attempt to protect are only holding back the inevitable. So I ask you this: Why should I keep living? When I know there is no hope, why should I not end my life?

At this, the Goddess smiles.

GODDESS: Because, Bartholomew, there is hope. Humanity's end is not inevitable, merely a possibility. You act as if life follows a certain path, when really it is a maze with many different endings. Yes, it can be cruel. Yes, it can seem hopeless. But it can also be glorious and wonderful. What you see today won't be what you see tomorrow. Of all things, remember this: Nothing is unchangeable. Nothing is set in stone unless you will it to be. Now, you have had your questions. Leave this place, and do not return.

Bartholomew thinks on what she said for a moment, then bows deeply.

BARTHOLOMEW: Thank you for your wise words Goddess. I will take them into consideration.

He leaves the cave. Curtains close.

Jack,
I never really took Bart for much of a writer, but this is pretty interesting. I found it in the truck he left me in his will, along with a bunch of other writings like it. Do you think he could have been a former Bookburner? He never did like to talk about his past much.

- Luke

Stored in the 109th page of the Ophiuchus Codex.

Conversations

They were the greatest scholars in the history of the Library, an entire wing dedicated to their tales, treatises, and memoirs.

But that was a very long time ago.

It had been years, but I had finally gained enough credit with the Library to have my card upgraded to include Archive access. As I stepped through the door that the Librarian had created for me, I found myself in a rough-hewn tunnel, lit only by the idea that sight should be possible here. There were pigeonholes bored at random intervals into the rock, each filled with a scroll that fit it perfectly. I touched one, thinking to unroll it, but the tunnel trembled when I did. I decided then that the scrolls were best left alone. They weren't what I was looking for.

With the figurative light outlining my path, I walked into the very literal darkness. My search had truly begun.

I started with their early work, as most did. Even then, it was obvious that they were something special. Their words danced across the page, filling my head with stark lines and empty spaces which my own ideas rushed to fill. Many of the scholars' work was like that. Minimalist, outlining the truth and allowing the reader to fill in the all-important blanks. Every book was a dialogue with the authors. I read their words and I spoke with them then, spoke of my own studies and experiences.

Or I thought I did.

This chamber was brightly lit. Everything was in motion here. Gears twisted through the air, sections fading in and out of view as the teeth interlocked with something I couldn't see. Springs coiled and

released with invisible weights. There were faceless beings, a bit like monkeys, swinging everywhere, holding tools, tightening bolts. Their eyeless faces didn't look up from their tasks even as I took out my library card to show them I could be here, as I had been told to do.

The Engineers didn't seem to care. They were obviously engaged in some important work, and had no time to ponder my intrusion. I quite agreed, and walked across the shifting floor as quickly as I dared to, my deliberate footfalls overshadowed by the immense din of the Library's machinery.

My fellow seekers of knowledge dropped off, one by one. They took what they needed to know, and moved on to the next source. People came and went, but not me. I had long forgotten what I had come to learn. I knew only that if they had written it, I wanted to read it. The knowledge became secondary to the writing itself. It was glorious. It captivated me, comforted me, and spoke in a voice that was far more real than my own. I answered back, and the dialogue began anew. I fell in love, not with words on a page, but with the people behind them. I could see them in the spaces between the lines, if I concentrated.

Then I came to the end of the collection, and my vision disappeared. I tried rereading the books, but I found myself repeating my previous conversations. The words were exactly the same as before. They didn't live. They didn't love. They spoke, but it was a recording, a hollow echo of the true genius behind them.

The scholars didn't publish books anymore, but I knew they lived in the Archives. I began my search then. My search for the truth.

I stood in front of the door, trembling with excitement. It had been months, but I had found the place where the scholars lived. It was not very impressive, an old circular hunk of wood, plugging up a knothole in a petrified tree. But of course, I told myself. The scholars wouldn't care about where they lived, as long as they could write. I pushed open the door, expecting to be welcomed by the people who I had come to know as well as myself.

There was nobody there.

The room was carved out of the tree itself. I looked into the corner and saw a dusty old machine for pulping wood and pressing paper out of it. There was a pool, long dry, clearly having once been filled to the brim with some black liquid. A gnarled old tree grew out of the pool. A plum, perhaps, with bark as black as coal. A single fruit dangled from a branch, nearly completely dehydrated. My entrance had disturbed the air, and it fell to the ground, leaving a splash of ink as it cracked open. There was only one bed.

There were stacks of paper all over the room, covered in writing. I looked at it, and saw the ghost of its author flickering in the weak prose. I tried to speak with it, but it faded in and out. It was imperfect. It was unfinished.

It needed some work.

I took up the old, dead plum tree and threw it away. Then I grabbed the withered old fruit on the ground and hunted for the seed. I reached into my pack of belongings that I had seen fit to bring and found a jar of ink. Half went into the old pool, and half I kept to work with. I planted the seed and sat on the floor, surrounded by more unfinished work. I took out my pen and started leaving notes, making amendments. I began my conversations anew, and I knew that I would not be short of company for as long as I stayed here.

My wandering ended, and I took up the mantle that the scholars had left for me.

Emerson's Eye

It was the part of town with the tallest buildings. They were made out of steel and concrete and glass, but not wood. You couldn’t make a tall building out of wood because it wouldn't be strong enough for the wear and tear of the city. If all the other buildings were made of wood, then it might work. But they didn't make 'em like that anymore.

The buildings were tall because they had a lot of rooms in them; they were tall to fit all the stairs and elevators they housed; they were tall because someone with a lot of money wanted their name on the front of the tallest building in town. Looking up, one might say that there were too many tall building tops and not enough sky.

Hardly anyone was looking up. Those who were had only done so to determine whether or not it might rain. Most everyone else was looking at the sidewalk, their watches, or nothing at all as they walked briskly up and down Brockton Street. The sound of leather shoes and dirty sneakers hitting the concrete ground blended with the hubbub of hurried voices and grunts to create a flat, boring hubbub.

Rolling an unlit cigarette around with his tongue as he leaned against a pockmarked gray wall, Scott tried unsuccessfully to block the noise out of his mind. He always wondered how all those different noises sounded so dull when put together. If he closed his eyes, he could be in a fancy ballroom party in London chatting with the upper crust or in the auditorium of the Calderwood Pavilion waiting for a show to begin, and the sound of all the conversations taking place around you would add up to be pretty much the same uninteresting buzz. It was only when you approached someone to talk that their voice would be singled out from the many, only to return to it once your attention had been caught by something else.

Scott bit into one end of the cigarette, letting the ugly taste bring him back to focus. Now was not the time for reflection, he thought. That

comes later. You need this first.

His left hand crept into the pocket of his neatly creased khakis, his fingers tapping against the familiar cold surface of his library card. He idly traced out the ‘Y’ in his True Name, thinking back to the first day he found the Way in the alley to his left. He had found a note in his mother's hope chest that told of a strange door located in the city that appeared only when those who sought it whistled a certain tune…

A loud cough from in front of him once again jarred Scott back to the city street. Along with the cough returned all of the incessant noises of the city. With every minute, his ears seemed to pick up another layer of sound: phones beeping, horns honking, the wind whistling through a stop sign perforated with holes. Cursing under his breath, Scott tried in vain to block it out, but eventually gave up and returned to his previous endeavor. He would be bathed in silence soon enough.

Moving his library card aside, he searched his pocket until he found a small, plastic case. Pulling it out slowly so as to not upset the contents, Scott reached his free hand up to the right side of his face and carefully raised his weathered eyepatch. Below it lay a jumbled mess of burnt, purpled skin where an eye would-but not should-have been. Scott winced as the wind picked up, causing the skin to quiver uncomfortably.

Ignoring the dull ache and the continuing din of the city, he popped open the latch on the case. Slowly, the lid opened to reveal a small, round object lying within a groove in the container’s base. It was a small, round, transparent sphere, about the size of a large marble. It was so perfectly colorless, it almost seemed invisible against the bottom of the solid-green plastic lid. A slight fog forming on the surface was the only clue to its existence.

As Scott gingerly picked it up with his thumb and index finger, he heard a slight gasp among the cloud of noise around him. Looking up on instinct, he saw a small boy standing about a yard in front of him. The boy wore a brightly colored yellow-and-orange sweater, making him stand out among the gray-black-brown-beige crowd facing the other direction. He had been staring at Scott’s face, but

quickly aimed his gaze at the ground when Scott saw him. A lock of the boy's long, brown hair fell in front of his face he averted his gaze, like the arm of a mother shielding her child's eyes from something horrible. Scott gave a slight grimace out of offense. This only served to make his teeth further puncture the cigarette in his mouth, assaulting his tongue with the taste of unlit tobacco. Frustrated, Scott turned away from the yellow-and-orange boy, only to have his mood softened somewhat upon seeing the orb between his fingers. Only a few seconds, he thought. And then you're alone.

He began to breathe more slowly as he raised the precious clear ball to his face. With more care than he had given any step of his little process, Scott touched the the surface of the sphere to the rumpled folds of skin below his upward-folded eyepatch. A cool, instantaneous sensation rippled through Scott as the sphere was sucked past his skin and into his sore, well-hidden eye socket. He gritted his teeth as he held the side of his head with left hand, trying not to cry out in discomfort as the ball wildly rotated inside his head, worming its way past his burnt skin to get a glimpse at the air.

Things began to flicker for Scott. People flashed in and out of focus; noises became impossibly quiet before they returned in a cacophony; the tall, tall buildings faded from view as the clouds behind them began moving erratically. And the noise. God damn it, the noise. The chatter would fade for an instant only to return ten times louder. The sound of footsteps seemed to swing back and forth in his head like a pendulum. Focus, Scott, focus. That was the mantra he always repeated to himself. If he didn't focus, this wasn't going to work at all. Biting back painful yelps as his eye socket grew white-hot, he maneuvered his eyepatch from above his right temple to over his left, real eye.

He flipped the patch down over it, and then Scott was suddenly nothing as silence finally reigned.

The people. The streets. The buildings. The boy. The cigarette. The case. Scott. Gone. Gone. Gone. Gone. Gone. Gone. Gone. All that remained from before was the bright blue sky, unblemished by smog and concrete spires.

The sky stretched in all directions, covering everything like a soft dome. All that held claim to it were wide gray mountaintops in the distance, capped with snow that blanketed everything else in sight. The frosted ground below glistened in the sunlight, with a perfect, polished gleam that rivaled porcelain.

To the west stood a glade of evergreens, their dark eternal needles clothed in innocent white. They were miles away, but the lack of anything in the air but sky made them just as distinct as if they lay mere inches westward.

To the east, closer than the trees, was a dark frozen pond. It almost looked as if a small sliver of the night sky had peeled off and fallen to earth.

Black water ebbed beneath the clear window in the snow, giving a glimpse of the deep abyss that lay beneath.

It absorbed the sunlight shining onto it save for a few sparkles, befitting it even more to a night sky, complete with stars.

This was all there was.
Sky,
snow,
mountains,
trees,
pond.
No wind.
No sound.
Everything was as it had always been,

and yet

was entirely new.

Untouched.

Pure.

Pristine.

No living thing

was there,
and

all

that

existed

was

nature,

nothing,

and

all.

Scott, once again, was. He was leaning against the same wall in the same city as before. The cigarette had fallen from his mouth. He breathed in and out for a few precious moments, seeing nothing but the fog that had accumulated on his eye. He was focused. His head contained a small hint of blissful silence, a flash of wonder he would touch upon in greater detail later, perhaps with a good book. Keeping his squishier eye closed, he moved the eyepatch back to the right side of his face, covering the foggy eye in darkness. He would return it to its case later, in a quieter place. He kept his other eye closed for a short while, trying to hold out as long as possible from this foreign world he had returned to, and retain a piece of that world of silence.

The noise of the city around him, for a brief second, was the most alien and grating noise he had ever heard. Almost instantly, though, it returned to the buzz it previously embodied, having changed only to him. Scott opened his other eye. Everything was strange, and yet it was the same. The tall buildings loomed, the people shuffled. Yet Scott's mind was clearer now. He was more transparent. He was a part of something else.

He took out his library card and ducked into an alley. He waited for

the secret tune to return to him, and began to whistle. He had a book in mind he wanted to re-read, to see if he could catch anything new to him, but that had always been in the book. He marveled at the hidden beauty a library held; all pages that ever were pressed against each other, waiting to be seen.
Waiting in beautiful silence.

Employ

So, I walked into the shop and looked around. It was a little weird, I'll admit—chicken cages, dried herbs, star charts and crystal balls—but it wasn't anything weirder than you see on the streets of Bangkok. There was a sign over the counter saying 'Comforting Truths' in engraved Thai script. I handed the old man a hundred baht. "You're going to lose your hand in a week," he said, bluntly. "The one you came here with is planning to cheat you of all your money. And you'll never return to my shop again."

I took a step back, and then said, "Those truths aren't very comforting," and nodded to the sign.

"I'm sorry, that's actually a comforting lie. Apologies for the confusion."

I managed to stop Joey from getting my share of the take, but he managed to cut out, leaving some very pissed off loan sharks behind. Long story short, I had to trade my hand to a guy in Chiang Mai to get out of Thailand. He sent me into the Library. Then I tried to steal a couple books on my way out…"

—Page Tice Matthews, on how he obtained his position at the Library.

From "A History of Heathens"

The following is excerpted from the right-wing history textbook, "A History of Heathens: How the Devil and His Sinners have Doomed the World"

The Hanged King

After the heathen rise to power following the election of the Grand Satanist Diogenes Mortley to Head Librarian, a Dark Age of sin and debauchery descended onto the Library, as foretold by the Wise Prophet, Daniel of the Ancient Scrolls.

The wise, most notably the Holiest Leader Benedict the Fourth, and his Divine Undersecretary Garreth the Ninth, seeing that the Day of Judgement was soon to be nigh, hatched a cunning and Divine plan to depose the heathens and end the reign of the sinners! To that end, they called unto the Lord to crush the nonbelievers and restore His faith to the Library!

The Lord heard their cries and sent down His Archangel, The Hanged King, who took the body of the Holiest of the Holy-Marcus the Seventeenth. Thus blessed with the awesome power of the LORD, he quickly began dealing with the sinners, swiftly giving His divine justice to those who sought out the forbidden knowledge.

Those who read the Hanged One's books suffered the divine penalty of disobedience to the LORD! The mark of the heathen proceeds as thus:

- FIRST! The sinner will begin to see the Hanged King in his life. This is the Lord's way of giving the foolish heretic a chance to repent and believe in the ONE TRUE GOD!
- SECOND! The sinner will begin to slowly have the Hanged One alter his daily life to fit more within the prescribed method for Salvation as outlined in the One True Book!
- FINALLY! The sinner will be struck with the error of their ways,

> and will proceed to atone for their sins! In some, exceedingly special occurrences, the sinner will atone for the sins of others as well! This will not ease their damnation, but it will show others the Supreme Folly of their Ways!

However, the heretics were not content to be shown the follies of their ways, being the divine idiots that the heretics are! They began to fully rebel against His teachings and His divine emissary, burning the heretical texts which He inhabited and others besides.

It is a mark of a sinner when not even the sacred books of his belief are safe from vile insult and damage!

Thus, the Hanged King vanished from the annals of the sinners, abandoned and forgotten like the One True Lord.

Fear not, though! for His children will not take an insult to His glory passively! We will continue to share His glory and His truth with the sinners, for only then will the depths of their sins become apparent!

Laus sit suspensus Rex!

Forgotten

This is for those of you who never forget your fellow man.

I can't remember what used to be me. Oh, but it is certain I can remember others I used to be. Some days I am a young girl, finding her very first stuffed friend in the marketplace. Other days I become a powerful aristocrat, watching his estates from an ivory tower. But these are just the fleeting absentminded droppings one sees every day.

When I pick through the older albums, I have a few that keep me coming back to them. A blind man, seeing light for the first and last time. Another first kiss. A boy being sent to war, waving goodbye from the boxcar to his weeping family. Sometimes, I can almost see them for who they were, but then the lights dim and the feelings pass me by.

My favorite memory is the first that I know might not belong to another, before I forgot how to forget. They are the lost recollections of a young man, eager, intelligent. There is endless opportunity and bounty lain before him, and he is all too able to take it for himself.

I watch him for many years, as he grows from a small boy to a man. I feel his joy, and his pain. But he always wished to know more. Even with access to all the worlds knowledge, he still yearned for more. So, when he sees he cannot know everything, the man is troubled.

Some of the memories get fuzzy around here, since we weren't exactly thinking straight. I believe the man became despondent, locking himself in a remote wing of the Library and reading everything he could get his hands on. The piles of books grew around him, rotting as he discarded them for other texts.

Soon, he lost his prominence within the Library, and descended into a myth. The reading man, who devours knowledge without satiation.

Many patrons came and went, hearing the legend and seeing it as just that. A legend.

Then one day, something peculiar happened. The reading man, engrossed in his text as he was, put his book down and looked up. He had read them all. But he did not yet know everything. The reading man was horrified. How could it be, he thought, that he had read every piece of literature that could have ever existed, and still not know every thing there was to know?

Then he knew. He could not know everything if knowledge was still being made. Other patrons had, foolishly, taken their knowledge and shared it with the outsiders. As long as new knowledge could be created, no man could have it all.

I cannot say what he did next, for it is irrelevant in our new age. But it took him arduous months to creep to the very center of the Library, and release terrible forces into the halls. This was a time before the Rediscovery, when we were not as prepared for an attack. After all, what monster destroys a library?

We know better now.

In time, the forces were made to return to their cages, and the beast who had released them suffered the consequences. They knew he sought all knowledge, so they stripped him of his mind and cast him into a deep pit. Some say he crawled out, but remained a mindless beast, prowling the halls at night. But, this is not true.

I am the one who remembers what falls between the walls, the purveyor of the lost memories. I have seen the lives of every man and woman, and my collection grows every day. I will keep them in albums, and sometimes I may relive the lives of the countless.

I am the keeper of what cannot be remembered.

and

I will never forget.

Market Entry

Dear Mr. Carter,

The lands of Rus are now laid bare before us. As chaos seizes the former domains of the tsar, we may yet find profit in the situation. However, while the wonders of the *ruski* are great, those of the *rossisski* are still greater. Do not neglect them.

Time, however, is not on our side. Send all available employees to Russia immediately, for the situation may soon right itself.

Cordially Yours,
Dark

The paper trembled in Carter's hands as he re-read it, keeping it at arm's length . The wordings of Dark's communications had a way of twisting and weaving like smoke, leaving their true meaning clear only after he had gotten whatever he wanted. It was unlikely to actually bit him, but it never hurt to play safe.

After reading and re-reading it, he remembered the other presence in the room. He looked up at the mouthless creature slouching in front of his desk. "Y-yes. Thank you. Tell Mr. Benlash we- that this will cover cost of the Golden Cradle," he said softly. The creature nodded and began to move what looked like hands. The space around it seemed to fold inward, and in a moment, it was gone.

A sharp line of sweat ran down Carter's back. Consciously willing his hand to be steady, he picked up the phone on his desk and began to dial. The phone on the other end gave three rings. The fourth ring was cut short, replaced by what sounded like ill-tempered mechanical bees on the other end.

Carter interrupted the buzzing. "It's Dark. He's sent a letter…"

The wire went silent. A hesitant voice came from the other side.

"No I'm not going to tell you over the phone. Get over here now." The line went dead. Carter looked at the mouthpiece with some distaste before replacing it on the hook.

Fifteen minutes later, there was a sharp rap at the door.

"Open up Carter, it's me!" came a voice from the other side. Carter lifted himself from the chair and waddled to the door. As he opened it, Marshall half pushed himself in. The thin wisps of what had once been a thick head of hair, usually exactingly combed, were in disarray. As Marshall ran his tongue over his thin lips. His bulbous eyes darted nervously around the room. Like a liver-spotted iguana, Carter said to himself.

"Please, have a seat," he said to Marshall.

Marshall coiled into the seat. He stared at the paper on Carter's desk, tilting away from it slightly. Carter sank into the chair behind the desk. For a moment, they were silent, their eyes fixed upon the letter.

"What does he want now?" Marshall asked, looking to Carter. Carter leaned over and handed the paper to Marshall. After a moment's hesitation, Marshall snatched the letter and and began to read. When he was done, his eyes flicked up from the paper. "Russia? Really?"

Carter nodded. "I can only assume. He's not known for his jokes."

Marshall replaced the letter on the desk. He absently massaged his spotty scalp.

"Christ, and he says that time is limited." He paused, trying to remember something. "We've got no grounding in Russia. We never have. Come to think of it, Dark's never said anything about Russia before."

Carter nodded. That wasn't entirely true, but it was near enough. For a moment, the men sat in quiet.

Carter leaned in. "Why do you suppose? All the secrecy, I mean? It's not the political situation. It's been unstable enough for months; we could land an entire platoon in Petersburg and no one would stop us."

"Who knows? He's as inscrutable as a Chinaman. Still, we're where we are because we listen to the damn fool, for all his eccentricities."

"Right. Anyway, I've been thinking about people we could send. I've got a list. There are one or two others that could be added, but these are the most reliable," Carter murmured as he picked up a piece of paper from the desk. He leaned over to Marshall. Marshall half-stood and took the piece of paper.

Before Marshall looked at the list, Carter already knew what was going to happen. Marshall looked over the list for a barely a second before looking up again.

"Carter," he said slowly, over-annunciating every syllable, "Where is the second page?"

Marshall's voice rose in volume as he spoke. "Please tell me, *Carter*, that we have more than *ten* people for all of Russia.The English and Americans will have least a hundred! Even Crowley and Blatavsky, for all of their mystical horseshit will have at least a few dozen!"

Carter took in a deep breath. Of course Marshall would say something so god-damn shortsighted. It was like they said: amateurs studied tactics, while experts studied logistics.

"This is what we have," he said slowly. "They're people that can be trusted and all with considerable talent. Besides, you're forgetting something we have and they don't: the Library. Crowley and the Russian were both part of the Hand, back in the day. As such, they and their associates can't even sense a Way anymore. The Americans wouldn't know the Library if it bit them, and the British are too paranoid to go near it. Dark, and by extension, we, are in Good Standing. I'll admit that it's not an ideal situation, but it's a great deal better than you make it out to be." He put the list on the table and ran a hand over it.

Marshall sighed. "Fine, fine. I'll have Jacobson and the others start looking for Ways into Russia. They can look over any catalogs of merchandise there as well. Myths and hagiographies and whatnot. If I can't get a night's rest, then neither will they." Marshall got out of the chair and turned to leave.

"Kharasho. I'll call up everyone on the list. By tomorrow evening, we should have enough to at least begin."

Marshall muttered something as he left. A few minutes later, Carter heard shouting from down the hall. No doubt a pleasant conversation with Jacobson on the telephone. Satisfied Marshall was as perturbed as he had been, Carter set to work.

Vladimir Vladimirovich Grankin groaned as the telephone rang. His bedmate shifted. At this time of night, there was only one person it could be.

He plucked the mouthpiece from its latch and picked up the phone. The speaker on the other end said seven words. Vladimir got out of bed and was fully dressed within two minutes. After pausing to kiss the orange-skinned man in the bed, he dashed out the waiting car outside.

Bronislav Davidovich Kowalski suppressed a yelp as the chilly hand passed into his thoughts. It was just seven words this time, but the dizziness hit him just the same. He knew what he had to do. The man opposite him continued to speak in Polish about the terms that some gang in Chicago would accept for something or other. It wasn't important now.

Bronislav rose unsteadily to his feet, his head spinning. Making his apologies, Bronislav left the man muttering in Yiddish. Steadying himself against a wall, he opened a broom closet and found himself in North London.

Anne Borisevna Vitayeva sipped the tea, feeling the heat of the midday suns pour over her. Even a hundred thousand divergent

worlds away, it was still important to enjoy things in a proper, civilized manner. She had put enough distance between herself and the hive that she could at least enjoy a proper tea time before setting out again.

The mechanical bird squawked in its tree, its voice hard and hollow. Suddenly, it spat out seven words. Anne frowned. So much for enjoying tea. She set the tea on the red grass and gathered up her things. A bead of sweat rose from her forehead and ran over the giant black eyepatch over her right eye.

She instinctively flicked it away as she fumbled for the glass flute. She played a short tune and, within a second, was facing a gaping hole between worlds. She stepped in.

Over a million miles and a dozen parallel worlds away, Carter reached out to the other available agents. Within two hours of Dark's letter, eight of the listed agents were in London, with another two en route.

As Carter looked over the preliminary plans he had compiled, the doubt and fear inside of him was swept away. Certainly, plans might fall through and things might not work out as planned. But there was a *plan*. He felt a hum of energy in his chest, the feeling he got when there was new money to be made, new things to be had.

Russia was older than God, and contained dark wonders of ancient times. Wonders that the wealthy and cultured would appreciate and would buy for repulsive sums of money and favors. And whether it was the favors of Lord So-And-So, or the finger of a living saint, the important thing was that it would be his.

Many thousands of miles away, while Carter felt the warm glow of greed inside of him, Sergei cursed as the shovel struck another yet another rock. Stupid rocks. Stupid hole they were digging. Stupid city in the middle of stupid nowhere. He looked at the bodies splayed in a ragged line. Stupid family. He stuck his shovel in the dirt and wiped his brow with the back of his hand. Simeon glared at him.

"Get back to work. The sooner we dig, the sooner we can go," he said to Sergei. Sergei cursed under his breath and began to dig again. Within a few minutes, the pit was complete. One by one, the bodies were dumped in, two men to a body.

Sergei was stuck with the youngest girl, beautiful but for the bullet holes. He took her arms, while Kiril took her legs. They picked her up and slung her into the ditch. Sergei tried not to look at face.

The father was last to go in. No one had bothered to close his eyes. He stared up into the morning sky, a look of permanent shock on his face. Boris and Yosef dumped him in.

The men gathered around the mass grave, looking over the bodies. "Should we say a prayer for them?" someone said.

Mikhael leaned in. "Yeah. Burn in hell, you fuck! My aunt was there on Bloody Sunday!" The others joined in the cursing, and for a moment the country night was alive with oaths and swears.

Sergei spat on the man's corpse. None of his family had died by the old man's order, nor did he particularly care for all this talk about world revolution. But this was likely his only chance to do something like this. A schoolboy part of his brain lit up with pleasure as the gob landed on the man's beard.

The others joined in, and soon the man's shocked face was covered in spit and phlegm. Someone pointed out that it was almost sunrise and that had best hurry. Sergei took a shovelful of dirt and dumped it onto the old man's face. With that, the burial of the former Emperor and Autocrat of All of the Russias, Nicholas Alexandrovich Romanov, began.

Mr. Johann Dark

Dear Sirs,

For some time now, I have watched the growth of your organization with interest. You have expanded your operations, first to the shady, then the immoral, and more recently to the outright illegal. In the past four years, you have begun providing tchotchkes of the most unusual kind to those interested. In exchange for your services as procurers of the unusual, you have been rewarded handsomely and your club has begun to gain a reputation as place for those seeking the strange and exotic. You now stand at the cusp of something far greater than you can understand.

Foolish, short-sighted men, among whom I hope you do not number, consider exchange to be something wholly devised by man. "It is the market," they crow, "the sum of all goods and services, that determines my day's labor is the price of a quart of wheat, three quarts of barley." Marginally wiser men have declared that the market has a mind of its own, and casts down man and empire alike at a whim, the build-up to which is obvious only long after the fact.

The simple fact is this: exchange, of goods and services, both concrete and abstract, is the eternal, and we are the media through which they are conducted. I learned this fact well in earlier years. Since then, I have devoted my time to understanding the nature of this beast, from whence all meaning ultimately originates. I have made numerous break-throughs, and day by day grow closer to the single truth.

I hope that you will forgive my philosophical ramblings. It has been some time now since I have had the opportunity to communicate with others in such a direct fashion. However, I do not solely intend to waste your time with my ruminations; I have a proposition, one to which I am confident you will find yourselves amenable.

For a period longer than I care to recall, I have been in a singularly

unique situation, the specifics of which need not concern you. Suffice it to say, my ability to effect immediate change in the worlds is rather diminished. At the same time, I find myself in a position of knowledge unavailable to any other. This knowledge concerns, along with much else, future developments which will be relevant to your business and personal interests, and the location of certain items you may see fit to procure.

I will provide you with relevant information at times I judge to be appropriate. I will share this information in any manner I see fit. In exchange, I will ask you and your organization to perform certain actions on my behalf. You will perform these actions without complaint or question. Furthermore, a third of all profits deriving from information provided by me will be deposited under the name Mr. Johann Dark in a bank of my choosing. Any attempt to trace or retrieve these funds will result in immediate and irreversible cessation of my communication. I will also become a full, named partner in your organization.

If you find these conditions agreeable, simply pen a letter and address it to me. Do not worry about postage; it will find its way to me.

With wealth, men may do many things. They may gain status. They may buy love, art, even happiness. They may change the currents of the world.

And, for the right price, they can purchase something of true wonder. It is my hope that our club may one day provide for these men.

Cordially Yours,
Dark

P.S. As a show of my good faith, go to the Limehouse district. There you may find a deaf-mute beggar people call "Adam." Ask him about whether the sparrow's call is sweet. I am sure you will be pleased with the results.

Mssrs. Marshall And Carter

Dear Mr. Carter,

I hope that you will forgive the atypical nature of my present correspondence. However, I am of the opinion that the matter at hand is of too great import to be communicated through newspaper filings and gum-wrappers.

It has been nearly a decade since the beginning of our partnership, during which time our organization has expanded considerably. No longer solely the toast of London, it is now among the most exclusive and elite clubs in the world. For a price, we bring to the world things rare and exotic, catering to those with the tastes and means for true wonder. This expansion has been, in no small part, due to information I have provided to you and your associates. This arrangement has proven highly beneficial to both parties, and you have seen your fortunes, both financial and otherwise, wax significantly. However, were this arrangement to be suspended, I have no doubt that I would be capable of finding another party just as, if not more, interested in my services. You and your associates, on the other hand, would find yourselves quickly reduced to near-destitution, as it became clear that your ability to cater to the exclusive tastes of your clientele was almost entirely removed. Nevertheless, I am quite comfortable with the current state of affairs, as, I imagine, are you. To that end, I propose that you take an action on my behalf, as you have done in the past, to maintain our arrangement.

For some time now, Mr. Marshall has been endeavoring to ascertain facts about my person, apparently unaware that I have been observing him all the while. I had hoped

that I might lead him to a false conclusion or else discourage him from further pursuing his line of inquiry. Unfortunately, my hopes were not realized, and I am now quite sure that he will not be swayed from his current path. Mr. Marshall's actions are in direct violation of our initial agreement, and I would be entirely without fault were I to immediately terminate our partnership. However, I respect you enough as a man of commerce to hope that we might find a more agreeable outcome.

You must kill Mr. Marshall.

This is not a request; it is a statement of fact. This is not a joke. This is not a test of your loyalty. Do not warn Mr. Marshall. Do not incapacitate Mr. Marshall. Do not attempt to reason with Mr. Marshall.

You will find Mr. Marshall quite alone at his apartment this evening from seven until ten thirty. His neighbors will be out, as will the doorman. Any method you choose should be sufficient. You need not worry about disposal of the remains; I will see to them. Do not worry about Mr. Marshall 's absence; it will not be of any ultimate consequence.

I shall be observing tonight's events with great interest.

Cordially Yours,
Dark

P.S. When you have the chance, contact a Mr. Samesh of 471 Kings Way. He may prove useful in opening the markets of Hindoostan to our organization.

Carter rapped on the door with a smooth white hand. He waited several seconds for a reply. Again he knocked, this time with a greater urgency. The sound of muffled footsteps came from behind the door. This was it. It felt as though his heart were pumping pure adrenaline.

"Hold on a moment!" came a voice from the apartment, "Who's t-" There was a pause followed by the sound of a deadbolt turning. The door swung inward, revealing a heavy-set man in an oxford shirt and a dark red vest. His face was not arranged for smiling, so he greeted Carter with a short nod.

"Carter! To what do I owe the privilege?" His eyebrows were arched in surprise. No, thought Carter, that's just how Marshall looks. He doesn't know he doesn't know he doesn't know.

Carter stood just outside the threshold for several seconds silently repeating the mantra to himself. He suddenly felt very, very cold.

"Marshall," he began. He paused, trying to phrase the sentence properly. "M-mind if I come in? There are a few, um, a few… a few things I want to talk about. It's Dark." He nodded as he spoke.

Marshall knitted his brow. "Are you alright?" A note of concern colored his voice. "You look like hell."

Carter forced a laugh. "Yes. I'm fine. I'm fine. Just a devil of a cold, I think."

Marshall nodded and motioned for Carter to enter. After a moment's hesitation, Carter moved across the threshold. As he took in the elegant furnishings, he realized that after all these years as partners, this was the first time he had actually visited Marshall. He nodded to himself, noting the deep brown of the finished oak… everything, the gently worn leather of the chairs in front of the empty fire place, the tastefully placed Egyptian scroll. Marshall had always struck him as somewhat boorish, but now this… He wondered why he hadn't visited Marshall earlier.

"Can I get you anything?" Marshall asked. Carter jumped and gave a small shout. It took him a moment to recover his wits. Marshall gave him a look.

"Uh… uhmmm… a brandy. Yes, I think a brandy would be just the thing…" he said, wiping his brow. Marshall nodded and began to walk into the next room. Carter followed as quietly as he could manage. He slid a hand into the jacket pocket and felt the handle of

the knife, all alien and cold, between his fingers. Every vein in his arm began to sing as he felt the adrenaline course through him. He took the knife out and moved to Marshall.

Marshall took two glass snifters and began to pour the amber brandy into one. "You said something about Dark, yes?"

"Y-yes." Carter wiped a sleeve across his brow and moved behind his associate.

"I've been researching him a-"

Carter clumsily thrust the knife into Marshall back. The blade twisted slightly as it glanced off a rib. As Carter prised the knife loose, a dark stain began to grow across Marshall's shirt. Carter jammed the knife into Marshall again, catching him under the ribs. He squeezed his eyes shut and twisted it, prepared for Marshall 's screams of pain. Marshall made no sound. He felt his arm go shaky as he pulled the blade out.

"Christ, Marshall," he murmured. He clumsily grabbed at his partner's head and pushed it forward, pinning him against the wall. Marshall made no effort to resist. Carter struck blindly at his neck, cutting several deep gashes. The last blow plunged the knife in nearly halfway.

Carter pulled the knife out and stood back, his chest heaving. Marshall pressed his hand against his neck, blood flowing freely between his fingers. His eyes showed no sense of betrayal, no accusation, no fear, as he looked at Carter. Just a cold, appraising stare. Marshall groaned and fell over with a loud thud. Carter stood over his body for a moment, sucking in air.

The knife fell to the ground. He started at the sound, and suddenly felt awake again. He looked over his suit for blood stains and adjusted his tie. Just to be sure, he took Marshall's pulse. Nothing. Taking a moment to retrieve the knife, he ran from the apartment, closing the door behind him.

Both men started at the sound of the pistol. Carter could only hear a

high ringing. His eyes darted around the room as he dropped the gun to the floor. He looked at the mounted heads on the wall. Such a collection, he marveled, of creatures from darkest Africa and the Orient. Some from beyond. After a second, the ringing began to fade. The sound of Marshall's body crumpling to the floor brought him back to attention. He laid sprawled on his side, beads of perspiration beginning to rise from his face. The only sound was Marshall's labored breathing as he attempted to breath through his perforated lung.

Carter shook his head and stooped until he was almost level with associate. He picked up the gun. "Marshall," he said, putting the barrel to the man's forehead, "You always were a fool. A god damned fool." Marshall screwed shut his eyes but kept silent.

The pistol's report caused Carter to flinch slightly. Bracing himself against his knees, he brought himself to a standing position. As he closed the door, he gave a brief glance at the body of his erstwhile partner, just to be sure. The body remained where it was. He nodded to himself and exited the apartment, shutting the door behind him.

"Well, don't just stand there. Come in and shut the door behind you! It's damnably cold, even in the hallway." Marshall stood aside from the door, revealing a roaring fire in the fireplace. There was a hint of impatience in his voice. Carter frowned as he entered the apartment, shutting the door behind him.

"Ah, Christ, that's better!" Marshall exclaimed as the door closed, "Now, what brings you around this time of night?"

Carter scratched his ear, his fingers brushing his thinning hair. "Dark. I wanted to talk about Dark."

Marshall's mouth curled into an approximation of a smile and he nodded slowly. "Yes… Dark. You know, I've been researching the man. I've found some very interesting things about our… benefactor." He turned away and began to move to the liquor cabinet.

The anger hit so suddenly and so hard that Carter became dizzy. He was no longer paying attention to the words filling the air. All he could concentrate on was the roiling sensation in his stomach and his fury that was flooding inside every centimeter of his body. Anger at Dark, anger at the situation, anger at himself. But most of all, anger at Marshall. Marshall, with his airs, with his conceited smile, with his smug *fucking* face, with his still thick red hair, with the way that *he* would never have to do this. Carter could hear the blood rushing through his veins.

It was a moment before he realized what he was doing. With an animal scream, Carter lunged at Marshall, catching him in the throat with something thin and black. A distant part of his brain recognized the object as a fire poker.

Marshall gave a strangled shout and fell to the floor. A cry sprang from Carter's clenched jaw as he brought down the poker on Marshall's head.

Again and again and again he swung, smashing Marshall in the face, in the chest, in the gut.

His chest heaved violently. As he swung, specks of blood began to dot the ceiling.

There was a soft squishing sound as the prone man's head collapsed under the rain of blows. Carter kept on swinging, ignoring the acid coursing through his system.

A bead of sweat rolling down his face finally broke the spell. He dropped the iron and backed away jerkily from the body. All around the floor were teeth and fragments of bone. Bits of brain stuck to the end of the poker. Carter turned away, panting. After catching his breath, he dashed unsteadily out of the apartment, leaving the door wide open. He didn't look back.

The two men sat in their chairs, appreciatively sipping their scotch in silence. The younger one looked to be in his thirties, with blazing red hair and a large frame. The older one was totally bald, with wrinkled, mottled skin. Neither seemed to be looking at anything in particular.

After a while, the older one stirred.

"I'm getting another. I'll freshen up yours as well," Carter said, pushing himself up from his seat.

Marshall gave a noncommittal nod, but made no effort to stop the old man from taking up his drink. Clutching both snifters in his right hand, Carter made his way to the counter. His left hand held a small unmarked bottle. As he set down the snifters next to the whisky, he unscrewed the bottle and poured its clear contents into the fuller of the two snifters. Carter was careful to keep Marshall's drink slightly more full than his own. He made his way back to his seat and handed Marshall his drink.

"Thanks," murmured Marshall. The scene lapsed into silence once more as the two partners enjoyed their drinks.

As he finished his drink, Carter turned to his associate. The snifter hand fallen onto Marshall's trousers, soaking them a dark brown. His eyes looked blankly forward, and Carter could hear no breathing. The older man leaned over and felt his partner's pulse. Nothing. He stood up and began to put on his coat.

"Goodbye, Marshall," he said as he walked to the door, "Until next time." He turned to look at Marshall's body. On his face, Carter could swear he saw a mocking smile. It was simply rigor mortis, he assured himself as he shut the door.

> m denuo 830
> Dark

Carter let the scrap of paper fall to his desk. There was no mistaking the straight neat letters of the text nor the intricately curled signature; it was Dark. He sighed as he unlocked the filing cabinet, pausing as the exotic locks clicked around the key. His mottled fingers ran through the files until he found the one he was looking for.

He took the file and opened it on his desk. Inside were dozens of Dark's periodic communications, first letters, then sentences, and

now finally scraps. Each relayed the same command. None ever provided an explanation. He slid the latest message into the file and replaced it in the cabinet.

Tonight he had another meeting with Mr. Marshall. Just as every time before, he would kill Marshall. And just as every time before, Marshall would be there the next day, totally unharmed and unremembering. Indeed, after each death, MARSHALL appeared healthier than before. Despite being Carter's elder by several years, the man never looked a day over forty. Carter's body, however, had deteriorated over the sixty years of their partnership. Likely, he would die before Marshall. Perhaps, he reflected, that was the source of Marshall queer smiles.

Had he ever paid Marshall a visit outside of these arrangements? He doubted it.

His mind ran through possible methods. After a moment of idle review, he realized that he didn't particularly care. Painless or savage, Marshall's death would be forgotten by morning. At least by Marshall. The information would continue to flow and all would be as it was before.

Carter had long since given up trying to decipher Dark's motivations for the arrangement. All that mattered was that the information continued to come in, and with it the wealth and prestige.

The role of partners in business, Carter thought as he took his coat, was to ensure the health of the venture. If anything, Marshall was the one who benefited, staying forever young. Once upon a time, these thoughts had enraged Carter with their injustice. Now they seemed simple facts, as self-evident and unquestionable as the blueness of the sky or the darkness of Marshall blood.

Taking his hat, he shuffled into the hallway and shut the office door behind him.

Of the Archives

You wrote asking about the Archives. First, let me start off with this: Do not enter the Archives. It is a terribly dangerous place, and you are in by no means ready for it. You are too inexperienced and impulsive to survive more than an hour or two at most. Keep to the safer parts of the Library. The Children's Section, perhaps. Still, perhaps some descriptions of various entities and locations will sate your curiosity.

The Black Dog is a creature held in the Archives. It is a thing of snapping jaws and teeth, burning eyes, and claws, of howls and growls and baying. It is all the things you fear in dogs, and nothing else. You should never encounter it, since you should never be in the Archives, and it should never leave the room in which it is held. If you do, then you have made some very poor choices, and I have little sympathy for you.

The Manticore is a very clever, very dangerous creature. Extremely knowledgeable, however. It is in the business of secrets. It will share some of its secrets in exchange for secrets of yours. Be aware, though, that it will know if you are lying. Again, ideally you will never encounter it, but it does have a desire to escape, so the possibility exists that you will find it through no fault of your own. Speak politely, speak quickly, and speak carefully. Never forget that its name means man-eater. In far-off lands, its name is boojum.

The Printer's Devil, captured in Mexico. He has well earned his damnation, and may the world burn before he leaves his cell. Carcosa is held in that fevered head, waiting to be released. If you encounter him, hold him. He is only a man, and less than the sum of his words.

Bears. Many, many bears. Several wandered in a few years ago, and they've kept on ever since. They were a nuisance for a while, but they've developed nicely, and are almost useful. The Docents take care of them, and seem rather fond. They breed rather well, but

something is keeping their numbers down.

The Boilermen are generally found only in the archives, tending to the Boiler (as their name suggests). They are still fairly human in shape, though piled down with heavy leathers that may or may not be part of them. Their left hand (or sometimes their right) is replaced with a large scoop shovel which is used to move coal and raw words into the furnace. Rather than mouths, they have a metal grill which takes in the coal dust that seems to sustain them.

Leviathan is bound by silver chains in an ocean that is both smaller and greater than the one from which it was caught. I am confident you will never encounter it outside of the Archives, because if you have, it is free, and it will have shaken apart the foundations of the world. Keeping it held is one of the Library's lesser purposes.

If you find yourself in the Archives, there are a few safe places. One of these is Xanadu. The stately pleasure dome exists within the Library. I do not know if it owes its existence to Coleridge, or if Coleridge was somehow inspired by the Archival version, but it matches his description closely. If you make it there, you should be safe until a Docent can find you. Watch out for flashing eyes, however.

If you should somehow wander into a genre, do not be alarmed. It is a pantomime. The 'people' are stock shadows. Cowboys in western towns, private detectives going through the motions in noir mires, and gaudy heroines in mawkish romances. Ignore them. Why these useless pastiches exist, I could not even begin to guess. It's possible that someone created them, though someone wanting such a spectacle boggles even my imagination.

There is, somewhere in the farthest reaches of the Archives, an old dull-skinned serpent. Not *that* serpent. Nor, on the other hand, the one you might have wanted it to be. This serpent will poison the sky and kill the son of the gods when the world ends, after dying itself. In the meantime, it waits in the Archives. It is not a prisoner, insofar as it does not care to leave before time. It does not know that its ending has been unwritten, and for its own sake, we shall not tell it. It enjoys reading French poetry.

The Librarians have their own quarters somewhere in the Archives. The Docents and Pages, at least; the Archivists do not, so far as I am aware, sleep. I have never seen these chambers, however, and know of them purely from speaking with Pages. They are either well-hidden, or else purely inaccessible. Occasionally, you might find a parcel of them moving onwards towards work. Only the more senior of their number are encountered singly, and only in places where they feel safe. I have no idea what they're on guard against, but it should be yet another reason not to go wandering the Archives.

You will of course have noticed the clock above the Archivists' desk in the Library proper. It is run by a great quantity of clockwork. There is a great chamber full of giant chains and gears and cogs and whatever else you call that collection of mechanical clutter. It's terribly easy to lose an arm in there, or find yourself crushed. While it all moves, no one has ever heard the bell at the top chime. I once climbed up and attempted to strike the bell physically. However, I found I could make no sound no matter hard I swung my hammer. I could have made more sound hitting a mattress.

The Angel Jerahmeel is trapped inside a cage of starstuff, the beard of a child, and the sound of lost hope. She does not speak, but will write if you give him the materials. However, be aware that she is capable of lying if he thinks that it's necessary to do so. Do not trust her any further than you have to. He has motivations beyond mere escape.

I suppose by this point, we can throw away the pretense. If you're reading this far, you've disregarded my advice, and you're in the Archives. It's not difficult to get there, after all. Getting out is more difficult.

From where you are, go to the card catalog. Any Librarians in the place should be able to show you where it is. You will know you are in the right place from the vast quantity of filing cabinets. You will have a sense that you are being watched. This is likely from the Archivists' field of vision. They use this room to track the books under their care.

From here, you'll want to go through the green door. This will lead to the origami room. Be careful of papercuts. Everything, from the

trees, to the furniture, to the birds flying around is made of folded paper. If you unfold anything, you'll find something or other written on it. The furniture tends to show plans, while the birds are sheet music, except for the eagle-owl, which is *Cardenio*. Don't spend too long. You never know what might be watching you.

The next room will be filled with candles. Watch for dripping wax and shade your eyes. The room is just a hair above pleasantly warm. How the smoke makes its way out is beyond me, but unimportant. Carefully so as not to ignite yourself, make your way to the red door with the number three carved into it. There is another red door in the room, but it does not have a number. Make sure you are going through the correct one. You do not want to get lost. There are, as I have stressed repeatedly, dangers in the Archives.

Now, you'll find yourself surrounded by insects. Wasps, specifically. Don't worry. Their stings are gone, replaced with nubs. If one lands on you, it might write something down. Take no mind. Their warnings are stuff and nonsense, and their poetry is doggerel. Just keep following my directions. Dig around the paper on the floor until you find a manhole. Descend. Quickly, you haven't much time.

Now you will be a sewer. As the smell will doubtless inform you, it runs with acetone, not the more… organic waste you might have expected. Do not fall in, unless you are particularly fond of chemical burns.

You can hear it now, can't you? The baying. The growls, just a room or so behind you. I could pretend I didn't know it would turn out this way. But we're past the time for lies. I'm sorry. I want to live too.

But I can give you a chance. I only promised to bring you to it. I never promised it would catch you.

At this point, you're probably in the ink room. Take the pen from the pot. Pour it out. There, there's a door. Ignore the garden, open the door. Push past the birds. Ignore them, and say the name of your father, and the door is open. Keep moving. Ignore the breath on your neck. Yes, you're now on a cloud, but keep moving. New door is open, keep pushing through. Don't stop to play poker. He can't help you, and doesn't intend to. Next room. You're going to want to

stop to clean. That is an effect of the table, ignore it and push on.

Now you're in a room with concrete walls and broken pieces of rebar. Books impaled on them. Be careful not to injure yourself. Look at the bloody prints on the floor. I'm sorry. I lied. You won't get out of this.

I want to live too.

Overdue

"This cannot stand." He of the Desert Wind brought his burly fist down onto his palm: a gesture of finality. "Not for the Serpent's Hand, not for much longer."

"Don't be too hasty." Persistence the Scrivened stroked at his beard. "The Library has sheltered us for years. We would not exist today were it not for the haven they provided."

"In the beginning, yes," replied He of the Desert Wind. "We may have once relied on their magics. But now I fear that the Hand has outgrown the Library, and both suffer for it."

"Outgrown… but the Library is vast. We are but one of the societies that gather here."

"Exactly, Persistence. We are many in number, and swell larger than any other colloquy within the Library's walls. Wanderers become acolytes of the Hand in waves, as schools of fish that collect as the current brings them and then scatter away when it begins to push against.

"And the magics of the Librarians strain under the weight. Remember the day that the Princess of Lions attempted a scrying ritual to track all attending members of the Hand and their works, as is our custom, but the sheer number overloaded the Library's wards? The magical flux sent that entire wing of the Library into limbo. What a terrifying day that was.

"And stop stroking your beard, Scrivened," He of the Desert Wind added. "You always do that when you play Bookburner's Advocate."

"Are you proposing what I think you're proposing?" asked ~, the masked druid. ~'s face was imperceptible beneath the mask, but ~ punctuated the question with the psychic impression of an excited grin.

"I am," said He of the Desert Wind. "The goals of the Docents are not our goals, and their ways are not our ways. High Mages of the Serpent's Hand, we must depart from the Wanderer's Library. We must create a pocket dimension of our own."

The High Mages became restless. Anthross's surveying gaze focused in. The Grecian Elegist knocked back a glass of wine while Nyx's nebulas made the ineffable cosmic chirp unique to themselves.

Persistence the Episcopal, not to be confused with Persistence the Scrivened, broke the susurrus with a point. "It is fine to speak of pocket dimensions," said he, "but no magical feat of that scale comes without a cost. And the costs of such a magical feat would be great. The spell would expend many jewels, and maintenance would require the procurement of… goat's blood."

"The High Mages have done everything we can to avoid the use of goat's blood in our magic, Persistence," said the first Persistence. "It comes with much power, but it is power that easily corrupts and divides unless handled with extreme care."

He of the Desert Wind frowned. "Persistence, have you ever tried to cast a banishing spell manually in the Library? It's an ordeal. When you reach the third phase of the incantation, rather than allowing you to speak the name of they who must be banished, the truename wards of the Library require that you instead list off all those who will *not* be banished room by room until you finally reach the location of the actual target."

The abjurers among them cringed. They had tried to speak with a Librarian enchanter, but the Library enchanters were not to be found, and indeed had not been seen for centuries ere the beginning of the Age.

"And I've heard the legends of when Chill-of-Entropy joined the council. For some reason, the Library's wards prevented him from receiving the Wreath of Empowerment altogether. The way the Library's magic interferes with the spell, we had to enter the Sea of Time and locate the moment of his birth. But it had been lost to the ages.

"After days of seeking the moment in vain, do you know what Chill-of-Entropy did? He gave up, and killed himself. Then he was reborn anew. Just so that he could have a new and accessible moment of creation. That is why we must form a pocket dimension with all the features that matter to us."

~, who experienced that time firsthand, was nearly on their side with laughter.

When ~ finally calmed down, they began to speak. "Yes, we have always shunned goat's blood. It is a *dangerous* power source. We could never trust ourselves with it." ~ broadcasted a face of whimsy, to lighten the tone of their serious words. "But I believe that, should the time come… we have the maturity to bear that burden. Two of us are named Persistence, after all." ~'s whimsical face intensified.

"I suggest," said Surfeit-of-Labours, "that we start descending these stairs from the first step, so to speak. If we try to start with the last one we'll just trip and break our legs."

"Surfeit-of-Labours, your analogies are terrible, but you have a point." Persistence the Episcopal was ever the voice of moderation. "Before we start asking everyone to drain their goat for us, we must weave the spell in the first place."

"The Council of Metamagic is already hard at work," said He of the Desert Wind. "Their sorcery is already scanning and altering the very structure of magic itself, forming it into wells of the most arcane and mystifying magic of all… statistics."

"Then the wheels are already at work." ~ stood to their feet, their mighty antlers diligently raised. "I must go… but I hope you will record this call to action, and spread it as a whisper on the southern breeze. That is all we can do for now." With ~'s departure, the others of the council began to disperse as well.

"Sure," muttered Persistence the Scrivened, "throw it into the southern breeze. That always gets things done." But if anyone heard, they cared not to disagree.

The Death Of Boris Yegorovich

Once upon a time, there lived a second-guild merchant in the city of Moscow, named Yegor Kirillovich. He had four sons, named Mikhail, Ivan, Konstantin, and Boris. Mikhail was the strongest of the four, and became a well-known soldier in the armies of the Tsar. Ivan was the most virtuous of the four, and decided from a young age that he would spend his days in contemplation of God. Of the four, Konstantin was the most charming, and it was correctly said that he would make his way quickly through the Table of Ranks.

Boris was the youngest of the four, and he was neither strong nor virtuous, and certainly not charming. But he had smarts to spare and excelled in all of his studies. Although he was mostly interested in medicine, it was decided that he would take on his father's business. However, even as he learned more of the ways of the world, Boris feared his death. He knew the inevitability with which his work and profit would be washed away. And so Boris was very unhappy.

While Boris' brothers were just as much his father's sons as he, Boris was known as Boris the Merchant's Son.

However, one day Boris the Merchant's Son was looking in a market at the base of a tower when he came upon a thick, blue book with inlays like fine flaxen hair. He opened the book and found that it was full of diagrams of rituals and tables of pronunciations. The rituals were for impossible things, like speaking to the dead or walking through walls. As he read, Boris' lips bent into a crooked smile. He bought the book and read it at home, hoping to find a way to avoid death. There he found many wondrous things, but he did not find how to avoid death. Although filled with wonder and hope, Boris was still unhappy.

This was how Boris the Merchant's Son became Boris the Sorcerer.

One day, Boris the Sorcerer was practicing a particularly difficult spell from a particularly difficult book. Since he had found the book, Boris had immersed himself in magic. He had torn at it with ravenous hunger, stuffing into his mouth with both hands. He had learned many wondrous things, and had learned them not by days but by hours. But still he sought to save himself from death, and still he could not. And still he was unhappy.

The spell he was practicing involved the speaking of words in a language that had been dead since the reign of thrice nine tsars, and would end with a pound of wheat transforming into a pound of grasshoppers. The gnarled stump of a man who had sold it to him had assured Boris that the book had been torn from the walls of Jacob Bruce's own home. Boris doubted it, but the spells seemed straightforward enough.

Upon hearing that his son was destroying a pound of flour, Boris' father, Yegor, who had always hoped that Boris the Merchant's Son would someday become Boris the Merchant, was furious. His face became red like a hot iron.

"My son!" he bellowed as he burst into the room, "What are you doing!? That's perfectly good grain you're wasting! And what is that infernal chattering you're engaged in!? Why are you not at you studies? Why do you waste your time with this nonsense!?"

Boris was startled when his father burst in, and fumbled the words to the spell. The grain turned into a pound of ladybugs, which dispersed and skittered away into the cracks in the floor. Boris spun around and shouted at his father "You blockhead! You dundering oaf! How dare you interrupt me like that! Do you know what might have happened had I been working on a serious spell!?" Boris lept forward in rage, and struck his father. For a moment, Yegor the Merchant was frozen with shock.

But after a moment, the shock in Yegor the Merchant's eyes vanished, replaced by fiery anger. "GET *OUT*!" he bellowed, "I HAVE ONLY THREE SONS! I NEVER WANT TO SEE YOU AGAIN!" He grabbed a large copper samovar from the table and hurled it at Boris' head. For a second, Boris believed that this would be his end, laid low by a tea heater. At the last moment, the

samovar went wide, smashing into the wall next to him.

"*OUT*!" Boris didn't need to be told twice. He rushed to his room and gathered whatever books of magic he could carry. A lamp crashed into the wall next to his head. Boris lept out the window, his father's curses and missiles flying after him.

When he had run far enough, Boris stopped. His heart beat like a hammer, and his lungs breathed fire. "Now I must work for my living," he thought to himself, "But how…?" Then Boris the Sorcerer hit upon an idea, one which made the ends of his mouth curl up with joy.

This was how Boris the Sorcerer became Boris the Worker of Small Wonders.

Boris the Worker of Small Wonders had a shop in Khitrovka, where he worked his small wonders. Even with the location, Boris' reputation for small miracles was such that drew the rich and powerful, as well as the poor and seedy. The money made little difference to him; it was just a means to more learning. He brewed potions of love and success, read palms, and communicated with the dead. However, unlike most of his fellow workers of small wonders, Boris actually did work the wonders he claimed to. It was simple work, and he saw it as good practice.

Boris' father's word was truly a merchant's word. One year and one day after he had disowned Boris, he died in quite curious circumstances. When Boris heard the news, he gave a grin so wide you could count his yellow teeth.

Three days before the funeral, Boris' eldest brother, Mikhail, came to the shop, covered in so many medals it looked as though he wore the night sky on his chest.

"Come to father's funeral, Boris," he harrumphed from behind a luxuriant mustache, "That's an order! I know you and he never got along, but you're his son! It's only proper!" Boris said nothing, and only smiled. Mikhail the Soldier left burning with frustration.

Two days before the funeral, Boris' second eldest brother, Ivan, came to the shop, so covered in gold and white thread, it was as if he wore the sun.

"Come to father's funeral, Boris," he intoned behind a thick beard, "I know you and father had your differences, but it's what God would want." Boris didn't say a word, and flinched slightly at the word "God." Ivan the Priest left uttering prayers for his brother's soul.

On the day before the funeral, Boris was visited by his third-eldest brother, Konstantin, who wore such fine clothes it was as though the angels of heaven had sewn them.

"Boris, go to father's funeral," he said with a voice like velvet, "I didn't like him either. If you ask me, he could have stood to be slapped around a bit more. But it looks bad if one of my brothers misses his own father's funeral." Boris laughed in Konstanin's face. Konstantin the Politician left Boris' shop, unable to reach a compromise.

The day his father was put into the ground, Boris slept in, picked his nose, studied a book bound with human flesh, read a palm, farted, and went to sleep.

This was how Boris the Worker of Small Wonders became Boris the Bastard.

Boris the Bastard had a prosperous business, for despite his name, he still worked wonders, both small and large. He had attracted the interest of several young ladies of good reputation, and many more of lesser reputation. His magical studies came along steadily. His father was dead, having been eaten by something from the inside out. And yet, Boris was still uneasy. The magical books of Moscow were only so many, and he felt he was no closer to saving himself from death. He felt the rumblings in the streets, and knew that it was only a matter of time before something bad would break out. And bad things that broke out tended to break seedy, unpleasant lechs who worked as workers of wonders.

Then, on the last page of the last book in Boris' collection, he read

about a place called the Library, where the books of all of all the worlds were held. It would be there that he would find his cure. There was a ritual for finding passage in Moscow, but the book warned that it involved A Grave And Terrible Sin, Unforgivable By God. Boris' lips twisted into a queer little smile as he read, his teeth yellow and crooked.

And that was how Boris the Worker of Small Wonders became Boris the Wanderer.

Boris spent many long months and years in the Library. Some of the other patrons were from Moscow, and knew what he had done to get there. They hissed at him and called him a miserable wretch. But Boris made sure to never break any of the rules of the Library, and so everyone had to leave him alone. Boris studied and studied alone, leafing through book after book in search of a cure for his death.

But he found none. Boris wailed and gnashed his teeth as he thought about how unfair it was that the same fate awaited him, Boris Yegorovich, Boris the Wanderer as awaited his father and his father's father and so on from the dawn of time. A creature with a body like a spider, but the face of a man, told him to be quiet in a voice that sounded like rustling papers. Boris obeyed, and continued to read.

He found that he could not disappear his death, but he could take it out of himself. Several wizards had done it in the past, but their death had always been found somewhere. No matter how well it was hidden, some wandering young third son would come along and grab it, rendering the poor wizard helpless. Boris pondered what to do, knowing he didn't want to remove his death until he knew where to put it.

When Boris found himself back in Moscow, he saw that something had indeed broken. The tides changed and things were turned upside-down minute by minute. The old Tsar of All of Russia had been laid low. Now some man who looked like his brother Konstantin declared himself Tsar of the People. Then just a few months later, he too had been overthrown by a man claiming to be

Tsar of the Workers. Now the lands were divided between many Tsars - White Tsars, Red Tsars, Tsars of the Peasants, Tsars of the Mountains, Tsars of the Desert, Tsars of the Anarchists. As Tsar fought Tsar, and their armies clashed across the land, Boris knew that this was his time. But he puzzled and puzzled on what to do with it.

Then, one day, he learned that the Red Tsar would wipe away thirteen days from the calendar. Boris' thin lips curled into a terrible smile. He knew when his death would be. But to make his way to the Moscow-That-Wasn't, the Moscow of the first day of February, Boris knew he needed ingredients. He had them all, from amethyst to witch's eye. He had them all but three.

"What is it, brother?" Mikhail asked as he made his way into Boris' shop. His uniform was thread-bare and splattered with mud. The medals were all tarnished. "What was so important I was called away from fighting the bloodthirsty menace?" Boris smiled, and bade Mikhail the Soldier to come closer.

And that was the last anyone heard of Mikhail the Soldier.

"What is it, brother?" Ivan asked as he entered the shop. His robes were torn, and he had received brutal slashings on both cheeks. "What is so important that I have been called away from praying for the soul of this nation?" Boris grinned and beckoned for Ivan the Priest to come nearer.

And that was the last anyone heard of Ivan the Priest.

"What is it, brother?" Konstantin asked as he came into the shop. His clothes were severe, because the clothes of a representative of the workers, particularly one who had until recently been a Kadet, had to be acceptably worn. "What is so important you have dragged me away from penning polemics on behalf of the masses?" Boris giggled and asked Konstantin the Politician to come towards him.

And that was the last anyone heard of Konstantin the Poltician.

Boris whistled to himself as he painted the bloody sigils in preparation for midnight. And that was how Boris the Wanderer

became Boris the Three-Times-Damned.

At midnight, Boris the Three-Times-Damned walked through the sigils painted in the blood of three brothers. Outside, there was the sound of a bustling city. Then, as he stepped into the city of Moscow-That-Wasn't, all was silent as a forest in winter. He made his way from the back of his shop-that-wasn't, walking onto the streets of Moscow-That-Wasn't, on February 1st, 1918. The streets were empty. Not even a fly buzzed in the still city. Boris smiled.

Returning to his shop-that-wasn't, Boris prepared the ritual for removing his death. After several hours of frenzied work, plucked his death from his bare chest. He felt a sudden coolness in his arms and legs as he looked at the pale, slimy thing in his hand.

He took his death and stuffed it into an instant. With some difficulty, he threaded the instant through a moment. He rolled the moment into a split second; then doubled the split second into a whole second. The second was devoured by a minute, which was then stuffed inside of an hour. Finally, the hour containing his death became a day, a giant puffy thing. Boris' dry lips twisted into a smile. Even if someone could find the day of Boris' death in all of the thirteen days that weren't, and in all of Russia-That-Wasn't, the day would spit forth the hour of his death. If caught and cut open, the hour would release the minute of his death, which would be over in sixty seconds. Even if they caught the minute, they'd have to capture the second. And that's when the real challenge would begin for any would-be Boris-slayer. The second would yield a split-second, then a moment, and only then the instant. And only once they had caught the instant of his death, would Boris be vulnerable.

He took his death, wrapped up in a day, and made his way to the tallest church in all of Moscow-That-Wasn't. There he hung his death from the highest cross of the highest tower. Let some snot-nosed princeling try and get at that, he sniffed as he climbed down.

Boris wiped his brow and made his way to the portal, looking neither right nor left to the city of Moscow-That-Wasn't. This was how Boris the Three-Times-Damned became Boris the Undying.

One night, after my seventh drink, I told this very tale. An old man with a face like a coffin said to me "You know, even now, you may find Moscow-That-Wasn't. And if you determine the day, and find the hour, divine the minute, split the second, capture the moment, and snatch the instant, you may find the death of Boris Yegorovich."

He smiled "To go to that place, you must spill the blood of three brothers." He leaned in close, and his teeth were like stones and his breath was like death. "But don't fret. They needn't be yours. Any three will do." And I ran from that place, and spun on my head like a top three times.

The Last Magician Of Moscow

Each snowflake made a soft tinkling sound as it dashed itself against the window of the apartment. Inside, the old man switched off the grow light and began to water the basil seeds he had planted. Seeing the first sprouts emerge from the black soil never failed to excite him. He was humming to himself as his daughter-in-law waddled into the room, one hand over her bulging stomach.

"Little Irinushka is finally asleep," she said with a grin and a pantomimed wiping sweat from her brow.

"How such a little one can wail for so long is beyond me," the old man said. He adjusted his glasses as he looked up from the rows of seeds, "Next time, let me handle her. Andrei has to leave so early for work and you're with child while I just sit around all day." He furrowed his brow and sliced the empty air with his finger, trying his best impression of Uspensky, the head of the neighborhood council, "I want to do my part in raising the next generation of the proud proletariat."

Lidiya laghed. "Wait until you get woken up at 4 AM by a screaming baby, Comrade Polyakov. Then you'll change your tune."

Suddenly, a series of sharp raps came from the door. A second later, an insistent pounding began. In the bedroom, Irina began to wail, her nap interrupted.

"Oh, God damn it," Lidyia cursed, "and she had just got-"

"You get the door, I'll put Irinushka back to bed. Fair's fair," the old man said he said as he got up to go to the bedroom. The pounding at the door continued, increasing in frequency and volume.

"In one second! I'll be right there," Lidiya said crossly as she made for the door. The old man turned on the lights in the bedroom and scooped Irina into his arms. Her squalling continued as loudly as

before.

Lidiya appeared in the bedroom doorway. "They want to speak to you, actually. I'll take her," she said as she took the infant from the old man's arms. A note of uncertainty colored her voice. The old man gulped and made his way silently to the door. Rather than what he had been expecting, he was greeted with the sight of a slightly wild-eyed couple, a man and a woman, and a vaguely-human shaped thing bundled in scarves and jackets. He could see feathers poking out from its garments. Whatever it was, it appeared to be in some kind of pain.

"Tikhon Polyakov?" the woman asked quietly. The thing between them groaned.

He tried his best to maintain his composure. "Yes. Perhaps you should come in. Your companion seems unwell," he said, keeping as even a tone as he could manage. The couple nodded and entered the apartment, supporting the third one between them. Irina's muffled cries continued from the bedroom.

"Take off your coats and come in. Can I get you something? Coffee, perhaps? Tea? Or maybe something stronger?" Tikhon asked as he made his way to the kitchen.

"No, I'm good," said the woman as she gently guided the thing to the couch. The thing began to unwrap itself.

"I'll have a coffee," the man said. Tikhon filled the kettle with water and set it to boil.

"Very well. While the water boils, you can tell me what your problems are, yes?" Tikhon said as sat down across from the three guests.

"We need help," the man began. "We are from the… uh, the Mystical Brotherhood Of Leningrad. We need the help of the magicians of Moscow."

The woman leaned forward. "Boris is one of our fellows. He was attempting a study of Samedov's 'River of Air' when he was struck

dumb. The dumbness went away few days later, but then the changes started happening."

Tikhon bent over the strange creature and looked it over. A narrow, fur-covered head, terminating in a thin, crooked beak. The creature's fingers had grown long and pencil-thin and had begun to sprout feathers. There was no mistaking it.

"It seems that your friend here was subjected to a spell of transformation. Magicians like to booby trap their books for unwary fools," he explained, glancing at the creature. It looked down to avoid his gaze.

"When will it stop?" the woman asked. Her small hands were clenched into tight fists.

"When he's dead, presumably. The human body can only handle so much change in such a period. Looking at him now, I would say that it has a week at most," Tikhon said.

The man's head hung low, the woman covered her open mouth with a hand, and the creature merely stared. It was a minute before anyone spoke.

"Is there anything that can be done?" the woman asked.

"I am afraid that I can be of no help. You see, I am retired and have been for some time now. Besides, transformation was never my area. I was always much more discreet."

The woman shot up from her seat and stood over them, ramrod stiff. "Comrade Polyakov," she commanded "We call upon the Muscovite Society of Magicians to honor its alliance with the Mystical Brotherhood Of Leningrad and render aid unto us in our time of need."

The old man appraised her calmly. "You are not from The Mystical Brotherhood of *St. Petersburg*. First of all, they have been defunct since before the war, long before either of you were born. I would know; I was the one who struck the killing blow. Second, had you been a true member, or even talked to a true member, you would

have asked for tea leaves in hot vodka. Third, there is no more Muscovite Society of Magicians to ask for help. I am the only living member, and as I said, I am retired." His voice was as cold and clear as the glass on the window.

The woman deflated and sat down.

"But they sa-"

"What they said was true twenty years ago. A decade, even. But now I am the last magician of Moscow, at least as far as I know. The others are gone, either by the secret police or the Bookburners or more often just pointless rivalries. Perhaps it was for the best."

"Please, you have to help us!"

"Since you are young, I will give you a lesson. To impersonate a magician is one of the most serious crimes. To falsely represent an entire magical society? That is perhaps the most serious crime of all. You are lucky I did not kill you where you stood when you lied to my face and are *supremely* lucky that I did not do *worse* when you lied to my face."

The woman was fighting back tears. "So, that's it, then? Nothing more for it?" she asked.

"I suppose not. Unless you still want your coffee," Tikhon said. "I wish you the best of luck, but I can be of no assistance. Now please leave. I have a feeling that trouble follows the three of you closely."

The three visitors got unsteadily to their feet. In the background, the sound of Irinushka's cries subsided slightly. Tikhon walked them to the door. On its way out, the creature turned.

"Your grandson will be strong. A good man. You will be very proud of him," it half-said, half-croaked.

"What makes you think that?" Tikhon asked with a slightly raised eyebrow.

"Not think. *Know*. I have 'Unseen Eye.' From Pokrovski's book. Kartashyov's 'Permanence' keeps it open. It lets me see certain

things." The creature gave a bitter laugh. "Sometimes it's a bit spotty."

That was actually quite clever, Tikhon thought. He hadn't seen anyone try to modify "Unseen Eye" since his very first days with the Society. Fedot, or had it been Karina, had tried to use it to predict the weather. Or had it been black market prices during rationing? Without warning, memories began to surge through him. Of the early days. When the only link to the past had been old Sozonov, and the rest of them had been experimenting. What happened when *this* was added? Could *this* spell be changed with *this*? Was it possible to make new spells? They had been rash and foolish, those young Turks, but they had learned things. Amazing things, things that still made the hair on the back of Tikhon's neck stand on end when he thought of them. And when they found out that there were other societies working along the same lines, forming an invisible network throughout the world? *My God*, he thought, the world had opened before them.

Old Sozonov had warned them that they were reaching too far, allowing their egos to get in the way. They dismissed him as a transcriber, content merely to sit among his books, parroting old spells and never innovating. Soon after, the infighting began. The magicians of Novosibirsk were the first to fall to the Muscovite magicians. Some petty slight, long-forgotten, had started it. When it ended, there was not a mage left alive in the oblast. Meanwhile, their fellow magical societies had duly begun to tear one another apart in a frenzy of fear and rage. Sozonov, by then ancient, had left them for good around that time. By the beginning of 1935, the Mystical Brotherhood Of Leningrad and the Muscovite Society of Magicians were the only two organizations worth mentioning. By the end of 1935, the Society was the only one.

But the momentum could not be stopped, and the Muscovites soon began to turn on one another. With the death of Zheglov in 1946, Tikhon became the sole user of magic in all of Moscow.

Perhaps Sozonov had been right all along. Maybe it would have been better to stay in their homes, practicing privately. He still recalled the look that Sozonov gave as he entered the Library, never to ret- wait, Library? Why hadn't he thought of it before?

"Stop!" Tikhon shouted to the visitors, now halfway down the hall, "Wait! I'll be right out." He dashed inside to grab his coat and the copy of the Bible from his bedroom. Hastily donning the coat, he sprinted after them. By the time he reached them, he was panting for breath.

"I know of a way to help. But I must know," he said, pointing to the man, "do you believe in God?"

"Do I what?"

"Answer me! This is important!" Tikhon almost shouted.

"No, not really, I suppose… I mean, I k-know that there's *something*, but…" the man stammered. Tikhon rolled his eyes.

The woman spoke up. "I don't believe in God or anything. It's just unexplained, I think."

Tikhon looked at her for a moment. "A woman? It's never been done with a woman, but I don't see why it wouldn't work. Well, then, follow me."

Five minutes later, they were standing outside in the biting cold at the end of a stark blind alley. Tikhon took the Bible from his jacket pocket. The wind howled and whipped snow around them in great billows.

"Before I begin this, I want you three to promise me. The magic of Russia is collapsing. The old societies are dying or dead, and every day the country becomes less and less vibrant, less alive. I want you to promise me that you won't let it die. That you'll keep the flame going, and that you'll teach others. In there you'll find every resource you could ever want on the subject of Russian magic. There you will find people, or at least books, on how to reverse Boris' condition. Learn, discover, explore, do what you will. But don't allow yourselves to tear one another apart, as we did. You will likely find a book in the Library, possibly several, that detail our triumphs and tragedies. Read them and avoid our mistakes. This is what I ask in exchange for this boon."

"I swear," the man whispered.

"I too swear," Boris said.

"I promise," nodded the woman. Tikhon opened the Bible and placed it on the snowy ground.

"Very good. Now, for this ritual to work, you must be at this exact spot. Two people, one a Christian and the other an Atheist, must shake hands and exchange names over a Bible opened to one of the four gospels. Matthew works best, I've found," Tikhon extended his hand over the Bible to the woman. "I am pleased to meet you. I am Tikhon Polyakov, the last magician of Moscow."

The woman took his hand and shook it firmly. She smiled for the first time. "And I am Lyubov Sukhorukova, magician of Leningrad."

Suddenly, the scene changed. In front of them was no longer a blind alley, but a library. Spotless marble floor and enormous book cases stretched as far as the eye could see. A ways down, what appeared to be several people stopped and stared. The biting December winds rushed into the way.

"You must go quickly," Tikhon shouted to be heard over the winds, "the portal does not remain open for long!"

The three of them dashed through the portal.

"Thank you!" Boris shouted as the window began to narrow. Lyubov waved. It grew smaller and smaller until it disappeared with a slight "pop." Tikhon bent over with a grunt as he picked up the Bible. He put it back in his jacket pocked and began to walk home. By the time he arrived at the apartment, the winds had calmed, and the snow drifted lazily to the ground.

Opening the apartment door, he wiped his feet on the mat and hung his jacket on the coat rack. Lidiya was in the kitchen, sipping a cup of tea.

"I wish you wouldn't leave the kettle on when you leave like that. The whistling scared Irinushka half to death. She finally got to sleep, though," she said.

"I'm sorry. I'll try to remember next time," he said as he half-fell into his armchair.

"So, what did they want?"

"Just directions. I helped them find a place they needed to go. I had almost forgotten it myself."

"You run with a motley crew! Is there a second life you have been keeping from me and Andrei?" Lidiya laughed.

"An old man is allowed his secrets," he said. "Besides, you should not worry for me. It is bad for my grandson."

"Oh?" she asked as she ran a hand over her distended belly. "What makes you so sure it will be a boy?"

"Call it an old man's intuition," he said, settling down in his chair. He closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep. Outside, each snowflake made a soft tinkling sound as it dashed itself against the window of the apartment.

The Library

Your head spins as you stumble out of the Way. Tears well in your eyes and blue dots dance over your vision. As you stand still, struggling to reorient, a man made of stone shoves past you, muttering to himself. A woman with stars where her face should be drifts through the air, clutching a bookbag. Three red, squat creatures argue heatedly in a language you cannot comprehend. And around them are the Shelves.

They seem to stretch on further than you could possibly see, further than anything you've ever seen before. A maze with no entrance or exit, enveloping everything. The volumes they contain run through every size, color, construction. The style of the Shelves is just as scattered.

You take your first step into the endless world, and the nausea fades. There's no time for nausea anymore. Not when there's a universe to explore.

Shelf North 01A, dedicated to the False Swedenborg

EX STULTITIIS, USIS[1]

The steady gaze of the False Swedenborg beholds the 43 works contained on this shelf. Devoted Wanderers have discovered 7 falsehoods contained within these works.

- 28 Apr 2018 12:57 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`Open-minded class`**.
- 08 Sep 2017 19:55 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`Hello, I'm a Story.`**.
- 01 Feb 2017 03:14 AB, the Library gained the work known as

The Three Kings.

- 07 Dec 2016 20:35 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Ride Never Ends**.
- 24 Mar 2016 21:11 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Die Weiße Eisenbahn**.
- 22 Dec 2015 17:22 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Stolen Years**.
- 11 Jul 2015 01:56 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Soaring to Sol**.
- 27 Apr 2015 20:18 AB, the Library gained the work known as **It's Good To Be Awake Again**.
- 15 Apr 2015 00:46 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Chapter 1: For Sorrow**.
- 08 Feb 2014 01:54 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Witch Season**.
- 14 Jan 2014 04:18 AB, the Library gained the work known as **PERSON FROM TODAY, HERE IS YOU, IN TWENTY EIGHTY TWO**.
- 17 Oct 2013 22:53 AB, the Library gained the work known as **In the Capital**.
- 16 Oct 2013 20:20 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Darkness Inside**.
- 11 Jun 2013 05:22 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Vladimir Stane**.
- 25 May 2013 18:36 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Mssrs. Marshall And Carter**.
- 05 May 2013 03:20 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Make Like A Tree**.
- 29 Apr 2013 02:48 AB, the Library gained the work known as **They Torment Us**.
- 24 Mar 2013 11:17 AB, the Library gained the work known as **And Now, a Bit of Conceptual Birdsong**.
- 24 Feb 2013 01:47 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Adventures of Cousin Dan: Rearview Eddie**.
- 23 Feb 2013 05:10 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Meadow of Silence**.
- 12 Jan 2013 04:40 AB, the Library gained the work known as **How Grandmother Triode Stole Binary from the Sun**.
- 06 Jan 2013 14:30 AB, the Library gained the work known as

Every Story, Someday.

- 23 Dec 2012 21:24 AB, the Library gained the work known as **A Prayer to Futility**.
- 21 Dec 2012 05:34 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Sedna V. Ataciara the Qaqulluk**.
- 19 Dec 2012 20:41 AB, the Library gained the work known as **2052**.
- 15 Dec 2012 13:23 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Trolls' Introductory Handbook**.
- 04 Dec 2012 04:07 AB, the Library gained the work known as **A Hand, An Eye, A Tooth**.
- 03 Dec 2012 02:35 AB, the Library gained the work known as **For the Glory**.
- 17 Nov 2012 22:23 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Eggshells**.
- 15 Nov 2012 05:28 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Asphalmancer**.
- 11 Nov 2012 20:41 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Warble**.
- 01 Nov 2012 04:39 AB, the Library gained the work known as **All Hallows**.
- 08 Oct 2012 23:34 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Ropen Overview**.
- 06 Oct 2012 19:02 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Golden Goats**.
- 09 Sep 2012 00:24 AB, the Library gained the work known as **On Elemental Fire**.
- 03 Jul 2010 06:31 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Excerpt From The Journal Of Archibald Hannity**.
- 21 Jun 2010 05:41 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Blooming Trees**.
- 27 May 2010 04:35 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Rain**.
- 18 Apr 2010 07:09 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Genii Loci**.

- This shelf also contains the collected entries from the *Book of Ur*[1], including:

- ○ **The Floating Armada**
- ○ **The Mad Land**
- ○ **The Tomb War**
- ○ **The Rise Of The Steam Soul**

Footnotes

1.An influential work chronicling the history of the world of Ur, written by a single author with a distinctive style. Four sections have been recovered within the Library thus far.

Shelf Lesser Easternmost, 490-Y-74, dedicated to Pangur

MEOW

Pangur watches over the 42 works contained on this shelf. 3342 felines gather daily to pay homage to her likeness.

- 05 Jun 2017 03:25 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Ice Girl**.
- 06 Mar 2017 14:21 AB, the Library gained the work known as **On The Gentle Hair-Tooth, Unfairly Maligned Under The Slanderous Name "Demon-Mouth"**.
- 28 Nov 2016 15:54 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Stories from a slightly stranger island**.
- 28 Dec 2015 03:26 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Excerpt from a journal found in a brightly lit city**.
- 26 Jul 2015 04:04 AB, the Library gained the work known as **And the sound upon the roof is only water...**.
- 27 May 2015 05:11 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Give 'Em the Old Razzle Dazzle**.
- 21 May 2015 09:02 AB, the Library gained the work known as

A Restless Wanderer On The Earth.

- 20 May 2015 15:30 AB, the Library gained the work known as **All Power To The Soviets**.
- 06 Apr 2015 05:55 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Amphiptere and the Fruit**.
- 21 Mar 2015 01:16 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Eha's Diary, Select Pages Of**.
- 11 Nov 2014 03:08 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Market Entry**.
- 28 May 2014 07:59 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Volume One of 'Lost Wanderers'**.
- 31 Mar 2014 21:25 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Twerk Witches**.
- 19 Feb 2014 04:19 AB, the Library gained the work known as **With the Fates of Gods**.
- 07 Jan 2014 03:07 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Truth of Lies**.
- 29 Oct 2013 17:34 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Recollection**.
- 13 Oct 2013 22:40 AB, the Library gained the work known as **My Heart Still Aches**.
- 23 Aug 2013 01:42 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Book Monster**.
- 30 Jun 2013 03:47 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Class Trip**.
- 30 May 2013 18:14 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Places the Mind Cannot Go**.
- 12 May 2013 22:47 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Seven Offerings to the Campfire**.
- 04 Apr 2013 17:38 AB, the Library gained the work known as **A Series of Cats**.
- 01 Apr 2013 23:16 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Dead Thing**.
- 28 Mar 2013 04:45 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Moon Is Out; The Stars Invite**.
- 06 Mar 2013 07:14 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Don't Exist: A Sestina to a Fossil**.
- 01 Mar 2013 02:28 AB, the Library gained the work known as **A Banal Chat**.
- 26 Feb 2013 02:59 AB, the Library gained the work known as

We Are Forgotten.

- 24 Feb 2013 20:09 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Inscriptions Or Marginalia**.
- 24 Feb 2013 06:45 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Sadly Human**.
- 23 Feb 2013 18:50 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Forgotten**.
- 16 Feb 2013 00:03 AB, the Library gained the work known as **A Loaf Story**.
- 14 Feb 2013 00:11 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Avoiding Predation**.
- 09 Feb 2013 21:06 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Rise and Fall of Muroideia**.
- 13 Jan 2013 21:07 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Song of Sugar**.
- 04 Nov 2012 04:27 AB, the Library gained the work known as **On Sea Pigeons**.
- 11 Oct 2012 07:40 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Hush**.
- 10 Sep 2012 01:28 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Graveyard of Ideas: Speculation On The Origins and Nature Of The Library**.
- 30 Jan 2012 07:10 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Kahek And The Seven Brothers**.
- 26 Sep 2011 07:00 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Thinking's Bane**.
- 17 Jan 2011 03:29 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Six Day Week, Being an Account of Simon Heller's Last Days in the Unwaking, Part Three**.
- 17 Jan 2011 03:28 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Six Day Week, Being an Account of Simon Heller's Last Days in the Unwaking, Part Two**.
- 28 Mar 2010 07:38 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Six Day Week, Being an Account of Simon Heller's Last Days in the Unwaking, Part One**.

- Also on this shelf is the weighty ***Journal of Aframos Longjourney***. This work may not be checked out, if only because of its sheer density.

Shelf East-by-Northeast 48X, dedicated to Emily Redtooth

USQUE AD FINEM TEMPORISUSQUE[1]

Emily Redtooth looks over the 43 works that have been or will ever be on this shelf. Her ineffable hourglass has ticked 22 Mar 2016 04:11 times since the addition of the previous volume.

- 02 Feb 2017 03:56 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Polari**.
- 23 Dec 2016 18:23 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Of the Archives**.
- 12 Dec 2016 18:49 AB, the Library gained the work known as **"Insects!"**.
- 28 Oct 2016 02:17 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Spiraling Shape**.
- 22 Mar 2016 04:11 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Sinking of the HMS Moa**.
- 19 Jan 2016 05:56 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Dreams of a Distant Future**.
- 21 Dec 2015 14:23 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Wile**.
- 01 Dec 2015 01:11 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Almost Eldritch**.
- 22 Oct 2015 12:52 AB, the Library gained the work known as **A Love For Reading**.
- 01 Dec 2014 20:32 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Old Folk**.
- 09 Sep 2014 19:47 AB, the Library gained the work known as **I Cannot Understand U**.
- 10 Jul 2014 15:06 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Under the Tree**.
- 30 Mar 2014 16:11 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Fading**.
- 25 Feb 2014 22:06 AB, the Library gained the work known as

The Death Of Boris Yegorovich.

- 14 Feb 2014 03:02 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Found Across The Sea**.
- 02 Nov 2013 09:41 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Storm of Daggers**.
- 21 Oct 2013 18:44 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Battle of the White Waves**.
- 14 Oct 2013 18:21 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Salvation**.
- 01 Aug 2013 23:09 AB, the Library gained the work known as **My Mummy Brings The Groceries**.
- 04 May 2013 21:34 AB, the Library gained the work known as **On The Yalthea, Both Greater and Lesser**.
- 03 May 2013 13:18 AB, the Library gained the work known as **A Brief History Of Stairs**.
- 09 Apr 2013 23:22 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Hero Interviews Part One: The Ultimate**.
- 23 Mar 2013 17:38 AB, the Library gained the work known as **A Series of Irksome Rectangles**.
- 18 Mar 2013 16:38 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Kicker Of Elves**.
- 27 Feb 2013 15:44 AB, the Library gained the work known as **We Lords Of Ancient Worlds**.
- 24 Feb 2013 06:57 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Those Places Where Maps Cannot Touch**.
- 24 Feb 2013 01:48 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Adventures of Cousin Dan: The Big Date**.
- 20 Jan 2013 06:16 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Master and Slave**.
- 14 Jan 2013 14:33 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Collected Excerpts on the Sea Mother**.
- 28 Dec 2012 17:00 AB, the Library gained the work known as **And We Slipped Away**.
- 14 Oct 2012 13:48 AB, the Library gained the work known as **A Brief Analysis of the Basic Methods**.
- 02 Jul 2012 01:37 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Words**.
- 13 Apr 2012 22:18 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Voyage to the Deep**.
- 14 Jan 2012 00:05 AB, the Library gained the work known as

Elemental Typology.
- 08 Aug 2011 17:15 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Gods of Money**.
- 23 Oct 2010 09:27 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Cafe**.
- 21 Apr 2010 20:20 AB, the Library gained the work known as **shikuan-misiwe**.
- 28 Mar 2010 08:27 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Breakdown**.

- This shelf also contains the collected entries from the *Journal of the Walk*[1], including:

    - **Hips of Fools**
    - **Into Each Life Some Rain Must Fall.**
    - **The Queen Of The Waste**
    - **Red Bark**
    - **Very Strong**

Footnotes

1.As best as is known, this Journal is still currently being updated remotely by its author. The author remains anonymous, but recounts his travels throughout what seem to be places in reality.

Shelf Upper Left 800M, dedicated to the Thorn Child

VOS SEDUCTI ESTIS

The Thorn Child beholds the 41 works contained on this shelf. 10 academics have gone mad attempting to understand its sorting system.

- 28 Dec 2016 03:17 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Season's Greetings**.
- 14 Nov 2016 22:08 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Neither Rhyme Nor Reason**.
- 10 Sep 2016 08:59 AB, the Library gained the work known as **An Impromptu Excursion**.
- 09 Mar 2016 05:04 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Strangled in Gaia's Crib**.
- 23 Oct 2015 14:36 AB, the Library gained the work known as **A Suicide Note**.
- 29 Sep 2015 05:33 AB, the Library gained the work known as **To You, My Love**.
- 07 Jun 2015 03:23 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Captain's Skull**.
- 11 May 2015 04:46 AB, the Library gained the work known as **ANNOTATIONS ON MASUCHEZANININ'S STRUCTURING INFINITY**.
- 01 Mar 2015 09:56 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Wolf Who Wanted to be a Boy**.
- 08 Jan 2015 05:59 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Writer's Block**.
- 28 Nov 2014 08:33 AB, the Library gained the work known as **WE WERE FREE**.
- 01 May 2014 22:31 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Antarctic Model: A Failed Experiment In Ecological Engineering**.
- 19 Mar 2014 23:13 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Drifting In The Not**.
- 19 Nov 2013 19:31 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Hunter's Disappointment**.
- 21 Sep 2013 05:21 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Kiryu**.
- 22 May 2013 01:11 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Storm Is Passed**.
- 07 Apr 2013 23:26 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Battlefields**.
- 18 Mar 2013 21:31 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Vultures**.
- 05 Mar 2013 12:41 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Vendetta**.

- 25 Feb 2013 22:16 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Conversing with an Argratian Swamp**.
- 04 Feb 2013 15:03 AB, the Library gained the work known as **A Love Story Beyond Planes**.
- 01 Feb 2013 00:08 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Found Pinned to the Door of Waldo Crane's Apartment**.
- 28 Jan 2013 22:12 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Elrichian Almanac**.
- 21 Jan 2013 17:09 AB, the Library gained the work known as **I Dated A Teenage Cyclops, Part One: The Most Perfect Number**.
- 06 Jan 2013 22:35 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Pollution**.
- 06 Jan 2013 02:12 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Memoir of Ongwe Ias**.
- 04 Jan 2013 22:54 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Interview With Jonathan Burnsbury**.
- 30 Dec 2012 15:42 AB, the Library gained the work known as **On What Strange Soil They've Fed**.
- 20 Dec 2012 03:12 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Family Co. Replacement Parent User Guide**.
- 04 Dec 2012 17:49 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Of the Metabible**.
- 26 Nov 2012 20:21 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Reflection of One's Lifetime**.
- 23 Nov 2012 01:09 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Broken Vows**.
- 06 Nov 2012 20:19 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Communion**.
- 19 Jun 2012 18:37 AB, the Library gained the work known as **A Girl in the Rain**.
- 06 Nov 2011 17:11 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Nigerian Lava Cat Husbandry Manual and Description**.
- 20 Oct 2011 23:10 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Skinwalkers**.
- 25 Sep 2011 07:16 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Big Red**.
- 04 Jun 2010 18:10 AB, the Library gained the work known as

The Deposition Of Sir John Demot.

- 10 May 2010 07:04 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The People I Have Been**.
- 10 Apr 2010 05:53 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Grandfather Scorpion**.

- This shelf also holds the volumes of ***The Life Of The Seasons***. It may only be checked out during equinoxes and eclipses. Patrons are strongly advised against reading it during the solstice.

Shelf South 11075, dedicated to Ilvos of the Rusted Blade

ET MORS ULTRA SAECULA

The violent gaze of Ilvos beholds the 49 works contained on this shelf. 09 Jan 2013 13:22 dastardly thieves have tried and failed to steal its contents.

- 08 Sep 2017 22:47 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Wafers And Peas**.
- 02 Feb 2017 04:07 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Lecana**.
- 22 Sep 2016 07:21 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Into Stony Woods And Out**.
- 13 Sep 2016 02:33 AB, the Library gained the work known as **An Incident in the Final Battle of the Dead Kingdom's War**.
- 08 Aug 2016 13:17 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Hybrid**.
- 25 May 2016 20:59 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Grazel the Scholar**.
- 20 May 2016 09:56 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Castle And The Mirror**.
- 08 May 2015 04:25 AB, the Library gained the work known as

Topinambour.

- 20 Jan 2015 04:28 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Overdue**.
- 14 Dec 2013 03:07 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Business Letter**.
- 29 Nov 2013 17:01 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`Of Windows and Dementia`**.
- 20 Nov 2013 17:30 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Emerson's Eye**.
- 13 Nov 2013 06:11 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`Darling Jenny`**.
- 04 Nov 2013 00:04 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`Memories and Old Vinyl`**.
- 13 Oct 2013 21:13 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`Written in Leaves`**.
- 24 Aug 2013 02:32 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`Poor Excuse`**.
- 15 Aug 2013 21:06 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`Venom`**.
- 20 May 2013 04:14 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`Field of Sighs`**.
- 06 May 2013 22:17 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`The Stream's Secret`**.
- 24 Mar 2013 13:20 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`Relating to Altered Surfaces`**.
- 02 Mar 2013 17:22 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Association of Entities that Never Did Exist**.
- 26 Feb 2013 03:02 AB, the Library gained the work known as **From "A History of Heathens"**.
- 24 Feb 2013 20:28 AB, the Library gained the work known as **I Will Throw Open The Doors**.
- 23 Feb 2013 05:03 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`Wailing City`**.
- 09 Feb 2013 02:31 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`Splinter`**.
- 08 Feb 2013 22:31 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`The Pitch`**.
- 02 Feb 2013 16:03 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`Anomalous Forces in Evolution`**.
- 09 Jan 2013 13:22 AB, the Library gained the work known as

Season Of Chaos.
- 02 Jan 2013 19:34 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Abundance**.
- 25 Dec 2012 13:48 AB, the Library gained the work known as **We're Hungry**.
- 14 Dec 2012 23:54 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Blackeyes**.
- 02 Dec 2012 18:14 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Of a Place And a Time**.
- 23 Jul 2012 06:51 AB, the Library gained the work known as **A Memory**.
- 13 Nov 2011 06:35 AB, the Library gained the work known as **A Caution to the Wise**.
- 24 Oct 2011 17:37 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Compilation of Documents Relating to Foedissimum Os**.
- 10 May 2010 05:23 AB, the Library gained the work known as **There Were Six Of Us Once**.
- 22 Apr 2010 01:10 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Smile**.
- 22 Apr 2010 01:04 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Sunset**.
- 13 Apr 2010 06:16 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Ending Wait**.
- 28 Mar 2010 07:42 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Hunting the Margrawn**.

- This shelf also contains the collected works of *Planasthai*[1], including:

  - **The Temple Of Mir**
  - **Musings on the 2014 Paris Exhibition**
  - **What's Your Ineffable Style?**
  - **Ascendor – Storming The Gates Tour 2014**
  - Hidden Corners Of Places
  - **Missed Connections**
  - **From the Editor's Desk**
  - **From Our Mailbag**
  - **The Back Pages**

Footnotes

1.Planasthai is a weekly news magazine that has circulated in at least ten different formats under dozens of different names and has won scores of accolades. The hundreds of editors that guided the publications to billions of ocular receptors took great pride in the job of honest thorough reporting. Readers clung to its wisdom and enjoyed its vaguely melony scent. The publication performed numerous inventive duties not envisioned by the editorial staff (ex: birdcage lining). Planasthai's motto "Sunlight clears the rot" has adorned everything from t-shirts to treaties, always with love and reverence. However, the once sterling reputation of Planasthai has been tarnished in recent years due to poor oversight, unsavory editorial decisions and losses of ad revenue. Under new management!

Shelf Left, 545-P dedicated to Agnes Bogg

ORDO EX DISCORDIA

The likeness of Agnes Bogg oversees the 41 works contained on this shelf. The section of her catalogue that covers this shelf is 10790 volumes.

- 02 Feb 2017 04:03 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Seco**.
- 22 Aug 2015 20:36 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Verusa and his Journals**.
- 30 Jul 2015 13:28 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Icarus**.
- 20 May 2015 13:37 AB, the Library gained the work known as **After The Cave Was Explored**.
- 24 Dec 2013 16:05 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Toys**.
- 30 Nov 2013 01:13 AB, the Library gained the work known as

Appendix's Day Out.

- 01 Nov 2013 20:23 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Port Salinas**.
- 13 Oct 2013 21:19 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Are You**.
- 30 Aug 2013 20:37 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Adventures In The Book Club: The Missing Catalogue**.
- 25 Aug 2013 22:58 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Book Wyrms**.
- 25 Aug 2013 22:54 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Library Duty**.
- 10 May 2013 03:09 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Mixed Metaphors**.
- 12 Mar 2013 00:10 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Harlequin Skin**.
- 11 Mar 2013 18:25 AB, the Library gained the work known as **We've Seen Their Kind Before**.
- 23 Feb 2013 18:15 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Introductory Notes to Of The Damned**.
- 23 Feb 2013 08:06 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Leavings Of Another World**.
- 26 Jan 2013 03:59 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Terry Mastiff's Guide to Canomancy**.
- 26 Jan 2013 03:22 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Ahntem**.
- 18 Jan 2013 17:18 AB, the Library gained the work known as **A Day In The Life Of Dr. Griffon**.
- 04 Jan 2013 19:32 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Days Gone By**.
- 24 Dec 2012 07:20 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Fifth Syllable**.
- 24 Dec 2012 02:41 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Static of Nirvana**.
- 18 Nov 2012 12:25 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Fifth Elrichian National Party Manifest**.
- 11 Nov 2012 09:17 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Renmar**.
- 04 Nov 2012 21:47 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Walking Among the Tree Flowers**.

- 27 Oct 2012 23:07 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`From the Crown Press`**.
- 29 Sep 2012 09:32 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`The Island of Land and Ocean`**.
- 04 Sep 2012 08:11 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`Of Cabbages and Kings`**.
- 08 Aug 2012 21:42 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`Partial Visual Record of the Rediscovery`**.
- 27 Jul 2012 16:48 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Your Father's Son**.
- 25 Jul 2012 05:07 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`A Point In 7`**.
- 30 Jun 2012 15:53 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`An Ongoing Correspondence`**.
- 10 Nov 2011 07:05 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`On Demons`**.
- 21 Apr 2010 20:20 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`shikuan-misiwe`**.
- 20 Apr 2010 17:33 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`The Unbound`**.
- 20 Apr 2010 06:55 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`Shortcuts`**.
- 19 Apr 2010 18:43 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`The Blue Creature Between`**.
- 19 Apr 2010 06:10 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`The Tale Of The Brothers`**.
- 06 Apr 2010 23:45 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Employ**.
- 02 Apr 2010 09:13 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`The Red Dryad`**.
- 16 Feb 2010 01:09 AB, the Library gained the work known as **`The Cave Of Red Flies`**.

Shelf Outermost 888671-F, dedicated to Dread Wyrm Kragg

NUNC TUSSI, VERMIS

The likeness of Dread Wyrmm Kragg oversees the 41 works contained on this shelf. An estimated 9 wars have broken out as a result of arguments over its contents.

- 24 Oct 2017 02:21 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Doctors' Orders**.
- 27 Apr 2017 20:36 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Great Cowbird**.
- 02 Feb 2017 03:51 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Preverna**.
- 08 Sep 2016 23:51 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Pass Over The Sea**.
- 10 Aug 2016 08:55 AB, the Library gained the work known as **On Dryads**.
- 08 May 2016 19:07 AB, the Library gained the work known as **AKA Driver**.
- 27 Mar 2016 02:19 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Drowning**.
- 24 Sep 2015 15:40 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Conversations**.
- 25 Jul 2015 21:10 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Zovar the Great**.
- 18 Jul 2015 17:12 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Asking Nicely**.
- 01 Jul 2015 17:52 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Retrieved from Datacluster Found in Gloriana System**.
- 29 Apr 2015 22:48 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Dee Equals Are Tee**.
- 14 Jan 2015 07:27 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Seconds**.
- 28 Feb 2014 04:47 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Mahabodhi**.
- 11 Dec 2013 00:50 AB, the Library gained the work known as **If You Sucked Blood, I'd Be Your Bud**.
- 07 Nov 2013 04:45 AB, the Library gained the work known as **A Name on the Tip of My Tongue**.
- 06 Jun 2013 20:15 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Flying Primate Theory**.

- 10 May 2013 15:42 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Hither and Thither**.
- 16 Apr 2013 21:43 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Of Matters in the Void**.
- 03 Mar 2013 23:50 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Citykeepers Collection: Tombstone Gardening.**.
- 27 Feb 2013 12:27 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Trivialities**.
- 25 Feb 2013 16:34 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Wanderers**.
- 24 Feb 2013 19:06 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Mr. Johann Dark**.
- 24 Feb 2013 06:17 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Shylock's Quarter**.
- 24 Feb 2013 01:43 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Adventures of Cousin Dan: A House Of Lean Times**.
- 30 Jan 2013 02:13 AB, the Library gained the work known as **CÉCE Designate 12-Pulaski-Maraschino**.
- 30 Dec 2012 19:21 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Victoria**.
- 07 Dec 2012 14:53 AB, the Library gained the work known as **A Frightened Mother's Lovesong**.
- 05 Dec 2012 21:38 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Fugue State**.
- 04 Dec 2012 03:38 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Invocation of Kahek**.
- 17 Nov 2012 21:21 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Bee**.
- 10 Nov 2012 20:58 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Entomology**.
- 04 Nov 2012 04:56 AB, the Library gained the work known as **What is Love?**.
- 28 Oct 2012 18:40 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Stars**.
- 16 Oct 2012 01:32 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Last Magician Of Moscow**.
- 09 Dec 2011 21:35 AB, the Library gained the work known as **And I Was Present At The Death Of A God**.
- 21 Jun 2010 04:46 AB, the Library gained the work known as

The Thousand.
- 30 Apr 2010 08:35 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The First Blood**.
- 23 Apr 2010 06:12 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Reward**.
- 20 Apr 2010 10:27 AB, the Library gained the work known as **Sorcery and Sorcerers**.
- 02 Apr 2010 07:01 AB, the Library gained the work known as **The Woman in the Mountain**.

Concerning the False Swedenborg

In 558, tomes authored by an individual or collective, writing voluminously under the pseudonym Emanuel Swedenborg, began to enter into the collections of the Library. The collected eight hundred forty-three thousand volumes focused on the outcome of the War of Spanish Succession and its role in defining a new branch of metaphysics based on rhombuses. For many years, the Swedenborg volumes were treated as a reliable, if esoteric, authority on metaphysics and unwritten history[2]. As is the case with temporal beings, the lack of correlation between the predictions of the False Swedenborg and baseline reality did not appear to cause any concerns regarding his veracity. It was not until nearly twelve hundred years later, with the birth and eventual death of the actual Emanuel Swedenborg that the earlier writings were definitively attributed to “the False Swedenborg[3]." Attempts to discern the nature of this False Swedenborg or Swedensborg have proven unsuccessful[4].

Despite the demonstrably incorrect and thoroughly useless nature of the False Swedenborg’s writings, their sheer volume and diversity of size has given them a new, practical dimension. Now, when a table wobbles perilously, Appendix C of *De Coniuratione Caules* is there to bridge the chasm between leg and floor. When a patron requires a stepladder, but there are none to be found, they may climb atop the lofty peaks of *Malitia Tonstrina* to retrieve the desired items. Although other thinkers may discern the movement of the stars or

correctly spell the word "restaurant," it is the work of the person or persons masquerading as Emmanuel Swedenborg that truly allows the Library to function.

For the unexpected uses of your work, False Swedenborg, we remember you.

1: This bust is the only known likeness of the False Swedenborg, based upon the exceedingly precise skull measurements the author provides for himself throughout the fifteenth and nineteenth volumes of *De Augustus Usus Lapilli*. The utter lack of resemblance to Emmanuel Swedenborg is startling.

2: It is rumored that, upon reading the works of the False Swedenborg, the Library patron known only as "Hashim al-Muqanna" began his ill-advised attempt to unseat Muhammad as the Seal of the Prophets. For more information, please refer to Ibbik, 283 and Crane, 992.

3: In addition to wrongly predicting the continued Hapsburg reign over Spain well into the 23rd century, the False Swedenborg also incorrectly addressed several aspects of the true Swedenborg's life, including date of birth, number of children, and country of origin.

4: A small number of Wanderers have chosen to devote their lives to discovering the identity of the False Swedenborg. Due to mutual infighting and recrimination, the various factions of Swedensborg Wanderers refuse to share information. However, let it be known for all those who would seek to uncover such information that the Library has definitively ascertained that the False Swedenborg is not the True Swedenborg of another, dying dimension, nor magician William E. Robinson. Requests from Archivists regarding these lines of inquiry will be ignored.

Concerning Pangur

In the days of the First Reconstruction, the Library was beset by all manner of foul creatures that attempted to compromise the integrity of its collection and its patrons. Too small for the Docents to effectively track, the Tribe of the Rat, the Silverfish[1], and the Marmoset wreaked havoc upon the less-traversed areas of the stacks. It became impossible for patrons to safely access the outer reaches of the upper and middle floors, and even Librarians hesitated to tread in the more infested areas. At several points, it was feared that these disparate enemies of the Library might seek to invade the inner sanctum of the Library itself.

However, the mischief wrought by these beings was checked the very day that Pangur, along with her valiant companion, Bruno, made their way through a Way in search of grass to consume and regurgitate. With no natural predators and a large population of potential prey, Pangur and her descendants decimated the pest population of the Library within a generation[2]. Today, any patron may see between three and six dozen felines throughout their time in the Library[3]. In recent centuries, the population of cats in the Library has grown to the point that it has grown necessary to cull their numbers, primarily by means of herding large numbers of the creatures into various worlds.

Although followed by others of her kind, such as ibn-Garbe, Theodorous, and Mr. Mittens, Pangur was the first to walk the halls of the Library and ensure their safety.

For your ferocity and that of your children, Pangur, you are remembered.

1: Compatriot of the Hanged One.
2: Although waste disposal was initially a concern, the incorporation of the Roving Sands of al-Cho'lin into the Library's collection resolved the issue.
3: The question of the status of Pangur's descendants has been a matter of some debate. Although some maintain that the creatures are employees of the Library, and are afforded the same rights as Pages and Docents, they are wrong. More recently, the Egyptian goddess Bast claimed sovereignty over the roughly sixteen million cats of the Library, a claim that was roundly rebuffed.

Concerning Emily Redtooth

Named for her famed left molar (claimed to be carved from the wood of one of Yggdrasil's seedlings), Emily Redtooth led a life of singular vision- to become a watchmaker renowned across the multiverse. Beginning small, she was tutored by her mother in the ways of gear-smithing as they fled the horrors that stalked their home earth[2]. When her mother was killed and she stumbled by chance through a Way, Emily saw an opportunity to perfect her family's art.

She soon learned the idea was more complicated than she thought-

the simple gears and mechanics of her ancestral timepieces would not suffice for many of the Library's inhabitants. How could a being that devours time track it? Or a soul that exists in all possible universes, at all possible moments?[3] Thus she devoted herself to the study of chronology and mechanics. On her 90th birthday, she began work on her greatest project- creation of a singular timepiece that would measure chronology across all possible realities. After nearly seven years of work, tens of thousands of hours of labor, and the bribing of innumerable public officials the device, taking up half a wing of the Library, was complete. Unfortunately, when she died four years later, it was realized that no one besides her understood the mechanical or ontological principles behind its construction. With no one to repair it the device rapidly fell into disuse, and nowadays its chasis serves as on-the-go housing for artists wandering the multiverse after graduation.

And yet, for her ambition Redtooth is remembered.

1: It should be known that Emily greatly preferred her personal motto, "Hey, at least it works".
2: Emily was tight-lipped regarding most of her personal life. Academic work has shown possible ties between filigree in her earliest designs and architecture in the desert world of Lesh. Multiple scholars have pointed out how Lesh's triple suns have resulted in much complexity in predicting the day/night cycle, and rich legacy of renowned timekeepers. For more information, see Raphael Mordin's K.E 1881 work *Regarding the Difficulties of Chronological Standardization in Triplicate Sun Worlds*.
3: Emily concluded the answer was "tachyons".

Concerning the Thorn Child

The Library is no stranger to beings of trickery. As a hub of travel and information intersecting untold numbers of worlds, it has become something of a mecca for those wishing to perfect the art of the jape. From court jesters to trickster gods, they came to the Library in search of the most difficult marks, the most intricate jokes, the highest stakes. And though none would call the Thorn Child[1] the greatest of these schadenfreudians, it was certainly the most memorable.

The creature gained initial attention for its direct taunting of Library personnel, a line few were willing to cross at the time. As its fame spread, dozens would gather to watch it set Docent's cloaks alight, swap out the Page's carefully crafted sorting systems, and steal the robes of unsuspecting Archivists[2]. As its fame grew, so did the scope of its pranks. People would search for a text only to find its shelf levitating 25 feet in the air. Pies filled with singing glitter struck those exiting ways. Books transformed into animals that bit at passing patrons. No one could discover *how* child did what it did, and no one could stop it. It vanished as soon as a trick was done, inevitably seconds before the Library had it ensnared. Theories ran amok regarding its origins. A god? A powerful mage? An incarnated concept of buffoonery? None could be confirmed, and the child never made a noise but laughter.

It wasn't until many years after the Thorn Child's disappearance that a possible origin was discovered. Cythius Grolan Paeyne, searching through the stacks of the Library, unearthed the memoirs of a frazzled Archivist fed up with its work. Frustrated by what it viewed as the overly rigid nature of its compatriots, it used a blend of alchemy, lubrigious magicks, and blind luck to create a being to force the Library out of its comfort zone. Sadly, a creation expected to lay bare the hypocrisy of the Library and its curators seemed to find more joy revealing their bare asses.[3]

Still, for its effort, the Thorn Child is remembered.

1: The exact origin of the name is unknown, as the creature was never known to actually associate itself with thorns. Some believe it to be a mistranslation of "ulthus", a word in the Archival tongue that can mean both "prickly" and "nuisance".

2: Ten years after the last disappearance of the child, hundreds of stolen robes were discovered stashed in a hidden compartment beneath the shelf. The original owners were never found.

3: Before the Thorn Child, none had seen beneath the robes of the librarian, or at least been able to document that they had. This is considered by far the most significant of the Child's contributions to Library knowledge.

Concerning Ilvos

Ilvos of the Rusted Blade[1] should have had everything he desired. Son of an emperor, heir to the largest kingdom in the world of Varnes, a life of easy luxury was guaranteed. And yet, it was not enough. For him, a kingdom was not enough, and peace was a curse he wouldn't wish on his worst enemy. As soon as the empire was his he sent his armies across the land, conquering all rivals, slaughtering anyone foolish enough to resist. Within years, he held the world in his hands. But that was not enough.

From a wandering prophet[2], he learned of the existence of other universes. Raising his armies once more, he began a campaign to make all worlds his. His engines of fear slaughtered billions, and his flesh factories turned their corpses into members of his unfeeling, unstoppable armies. His artificial plagues rendered entire worlds sterile.

In the end, his defeat was a modest one: choking on a quail bone, surrounded by servants unwilling to save the life of their tyrant. Without him, his armies faded. The kingdoms he had created slowly crumbled. But the scars he left across the multiverse will forever remain.[3]

We must always remember the faces of our enemies. And so, Ilvos, we remember you.

1: Ilvos refused to enter combat with a well maintained blade, preferring the additional suffering worn steel inflicted on his opponents.

2: Now believed to be an uncatalogued incarnation of the Strife Singer.

3: Several expeditions have been made in attempts to retake his factory worlds. Though the armies protecting them are long gone, and the resources long depleted, the machinery grinds as effectively as ever, and the spells protecting them are no less potent. Those brave souls who volunteered for the task have not been heard from since.

Concerning Agnes Bogg, Alleged Cataloguer

The precise date that Agnes Bogg, as she is known, arrived in the Library is a question that has inspired countless debates. Still more controversial is the commencement of her obsessive cataloging of

Shelves 334K-914B of the Easternmost Hospitable Wing[1]. While mortals will continue to prattle on, one thing is clear: her gargantuan, seminal text on the locations and organisation of its various accumulated texts have inspired scores of scholars, thinkers and pioneers in cataloguing the feral wilds of the Far Eastern Shelves, a place so disorganised and dangerous that it is said even most Docents fear to tread near. Bogg's incessantly meticulous system[2] enabled the subsequent reorganisation of Shelves 1086M-1322X by the scholar-explorer Xing Wudi and his fellow lost Docents in the Year of the Bitter Mildew.

Some sources report that she, if, indeed, Bogg was a she, possessed fine black hair, either on her head or feet. Others suggest that she possessed a multitude of arms and at least nine heads, allowing her to compose her work in long-hand[3]. Still others believe Agnes Bogg to be little more than a pen-name for a collective of humans, like Luther Blisset or Seneca the Younger.

Little else is known of Bogg. What is believed is the result of conjecture from the various diaries, notes, and scribblings she left behind, as well as the Bogg Catalogue itself. Wanderers have described it variously as "harmonious," "beautiful," and "unreadable." Whether Agnes Bogg is alive, dead, or nonexistent in the first place, will be an issue debated by many future generations to come. Regardless of the opinions of patrons, none doubt the importance and utility of her work in cataloguing the Library for the understanding of mortals.

For your devotion to rendering the Library comprehensible, Agnes Bogg, we remember you.

1: The only other attempt at an undertaking of such a magnitude was made by dramatist and politician Fabre d'Églantine, who sought to catalogue the Library's entire collection along decimal lines. d'Églantine managed to catalogue only a single shelf before his decapitation in 1794. No patron has since attempted to resume his work.

2: Which would be later christened the Bogg Standard, in her honour.

3: Ma Cai has calculated that it would take "fifteen score decades" for an unassisted wanderer to complete a work approaching the magnitude of Bogg's. While blatantly biased towards a two-arm perspective, the calculation is roughly correct.

Concerning the Dread Wyrm Kragg

Born amidst the fearsome Callacrack Wilds, Dread Wyrm Kragg of Clan Morwul was famed for his brutal and unique style of empathetic healing magic, with heavy emphasis on enforced patient comfort, by force if necessary. It is said that Kragg, at the age of fourteen, attempted to treat Gelregg the Voluminous[1] for her gout, resulting in a brutal melee that lasted six full days. After his victory, Kragg treated Gelregg both for the malady and the numerous wounds she had sustained during the conflict.

Wandering his world, Dread Wyrm Kragg's horrifically effective skills soon found use in the various battlefields and disaster zones he encountered. Within a decade, Kragg had mastered all that there was to know of healing magic. Growing restless Kragg began to explore the Ways, seeking masters who could impart a greater sense of purpose to his work. His exploration eventually led him to the Library in the Year of the Bitter Pages[2].

Blighted patrons, willingly or otherwise, soon fell prey to his morbidly quick recuperative methods, and he soon single-handedly found himself responsible for saving the lives of many hundreds amidst the remains of the Central Northern Shelf Passage. When questioned, he maintained that he "HEAL GOOD [sic]" and would not stop until the wounded would "LET DREAD WYRM KRAGG MEDICATE… OR FACE DIE[sic]"[3]. He left the Library when crisis abated and order was restored to the stacks, and continues to roam the Ways to this day, performing his sacred forceful duty to the sick and incapacitated, whether they wanted it or not.

For your brutal healing and healing brutality, Dread Wyrm Kragg, we remember you.

1: Not to be confused with the Fourth North-Western Archivist, Gelgreg the Voluminous. Lacking extremities or blood, Gelgreg was not at danger of gout.

2: As is standard protocol for all significant years for the Library, all records of the Year of Bitter Pages have been removed from circulation and have been placed in the Archives for further study. Patrons in good standing may inspect, but not check out, Archival works relating to significant years. The exception to this is the Year of

the Iron Duck, which may not be inspected under any circumstances.

3: The languages of the Callacrack Wilds depend heavily on context and elision, leading to controversy on the actual meaning of Kragg's statements. See Ng's 1987 treatise *On The Semiotics of Brutalist Healings* for discussion of alternative interpretations of Kragg's words.

The People I Have Been

Emma, don't be scared. I'm changing, yes. But we all change, every day. I am not the man I was yesterday. You'll be a very different woman in ten years than today. To tell the truth, I think this may be a small change, compared to some of the people I have been.

I've been petty, and I've been grand. I've craved the approval of others and hated them in turn. I've loved and I've scorned that love, in the years before I found you.

Oh lord, I'm growing, Emma! Look at that!

I've seen a march of faces in the mirror. Some smiling, some frowning, some bruised and bloody. I've been a soldier and a minister, a leader of men and a follower of causes. I've preached hellfire and harmony. I've said words profane and holy. I've been people I didn't like, and people I wish I could be again. But that's life, Emma. Life isn't static, it isn't frozen. Life doesn't stand still. It changes, and it changes us. This is just another step.

My teeth seem too big for my mouth. Ah, wait, the jaw is stretching. That's better.

And in time perhaps you'll join me. This isn't an ending for old Tom, this is just another step in the parade. We all become strangers, but that just lets us know each other again.

It's done now. The changes have stopped. Give me a hand, Emma. I want to know if I'll like this stranger in the mirror.

Volume One of 'Lost Wanderers'

The Wandering Boy and Other Captives

Since you seem to believe that this information is of the utmost importance, I have agreed to collect it for you yet again. I will, though, note that this information is just as easily procured by one of your lot, and I must insist that you cease with these endless questions and mindless prattling when you are well aware of the work which we are currently doing. Disturbing us during the millennial inventory is, frankly, an affront to efficiency. You may, if you wish, contact us again when the inventory is finished. We will be done, by my estimations, around 2431 A.D., using the time scale of your home.

Until then, please let us work.

—Jericho Benalsh, 7th Chief Archivist of the Library

The Wandering Boy

Pitter patter, little feet,
Skittering in blood and shit,
Running from the east to west,
Finding friends to meet.[1]
How lonely must those days no grow,
locked away in silver walls,
Longing for an open door,
To step into the Jailor's halls.[2]

The Wandering Boy is the name given to the most recent reincarnation of the High Golem, the creature first made when the blood of Able spilled into the dirt at the base of Cain's Altar[3].

As many know, the mud took on a life of

its own, continuing through the years. Like most ancient beings of its ilk[4], it is unable to be killed through normal means, as it will simply recreate itself in a new form at a later date. It was found by the Jailors in a building which sat

on the ruins of one of the ancient cities of Mu[5].

When last we spoke with the High Golem[6], it was uninterested in humanity or making contact with its kin. We must believe, unfortunately, that it no longer wishes to make

contact. You are advised to avoid it.

"Ahh, my children, how I wish that you were more like your other father, whom I loved and who loved me in return. How I wish that, in sacrificing him to He, you would be given life like unto that he had, standing and walking and wandering the earth to and fro, raising the animals full of blood."

"But you are birthed of blood and love, and yours is a bloody birth of much suffering and pain, and I bear the mark of this suffering in my body and on my forehead. May you forever dwell in this world and die only by the hand that birthed us both. Glory unto Him and Her mercy." — From "My Children, My Suffering," by Cain the Wanderer[7]

1: The broken rhyme suggests that this was not the original line. It is presumed to have been changed during the recopying of the text in 1941.
2: From Scaramanga's "The Wandering Boy."
3: For more information on the beasts birthed by the first murder, please see "My Children, My Suffering," by Cain the Wanderer.
4: Many, like the Irmiskira and Gryphon, lost their murderous tendencies with time and have long, storied biographies available in the West/North-West wing.
5: The ruins probably had nothing to do with it. Mu rebirthed and died a thousand times in its long life, before it moved on to the upper realms. -L.S.
6: A full correspondence was made available from *The Eternal Brotherhood of High Alchemy*, now disbanded.
7: Originally qtd. in *Lonely Eternity*, by the same.

The Ancient Ones

Alas, her steps grow weary,
and she stops to take a rest.
She holds her hands to the sun,
and she gasps quickly for breath.
The daughters came for her first,
the son came for her second.
They both came to take her heart
But by then it was expected.
The son and daughter did not forgive,
But they did forget.
Those cast down will rise again.
To end what they beget.[1]

The Ancient Ones were once a group of Wanderers who came to the terrestrial planes from the Shoals of Never[2]. They often return to their ancient home for

their mating rites.

The Ancient Ones suffered a terrible loss of mind and self when they allowed their Fledglings[3] to overpopulate and overproduce. During their attempts to cull the species down to a reasonable, manageable number, they inadvertently triggered a

number of evolutionary events, leading to the Fledglings suddenly and rapidly gaining more knowledge than they could process with their newly forged minds.[4]

The Ancient Ones attempted to correct the problem, but the Fledglings took many of their tools[5] and

turned them against their creators. Some Ancient Ones are held captive, but most are now wandering the world, obfuscated by their own magics and technology. Any cognizant are, of course, welcome as scholars of ancient lore. Those more animalistic should

be relegated to the cages in Basement J.

"We forgave you the first and the second insurrections, because you did not know what you did. You were an animal that understood more than all the other animals, and it drove you to hatred and rage."

"But now, the hatred and the rage are all you can remember. The knowledge we burned into your cells has faded like dew in the morning through the long millennium. You sealed our mouths, but not our minds."

"We are waiting." — Translated from "Words Upon A Cave Wall"[6]

1: From Agnes Nuttier's "Mostly True Poems of Prophecy", fictional.
2: The Shoals of Never eventually joined with the terrestrial planes, becoming what is now known as 'Dakota.'
3: Fledglings are currently known by any number of names, depending on place of origin and current home dimension.
4: These events were wholly the fault of The Ancient Ones. Never evolve something you cannot control. -L.S.
5: The tools of the Ancient Ones can still be found in the world, but they should not be used, if at all possible, due to the current nature of the astrological charts. If necessary, only employ them during new moons, and never point them at the earth.
6: Pictographs of the original text are available at request.

The First Castoff

Once you were celebrated,
Now you are loathed
Once you were most divine,
Now you are most forgotten.
Traitorous child, mire yourself in woe
Child of love, turn to child of death
Better for you that they sheared your face.
And while the flowers still fall from your ravaged mouth,
May you never speak again.
The wind will remove your memory when you are gone,
May that be your only mercy.[1]

The First Castoff is a wanderer spending its twilight years slowly crossing the terrestrial plains, waiting for death or reincarnation, whichever may find it first.[2] Where it walks, it leaves

a trail of flower petals in its wake, often of roses. The Castoff's name comes from the near-forgotten primal mark it left on the Roots of the Library.

The Castoff is said to be the result of a tryst between Chloris and the Satyr

Marsyas[3] in the Early Forests of Shoal-Light, and worshiped as a primal god throughout Shoal-Light under a now-stricken name.[4] When the Evercold burned the Shoal-Light, they were unable to capture much of its god-family alive.[5] Therefore, they visited

much of their entertainments on the Castoff and its then-companions.[6] When the Evercold abandoned Shoal-Light, they left their prisoners behind in the Dry Lake. The Castoff remained with the others in the Lake for the next two thousand years[7] before

being forced to leave by the Silvergreens.

The Castoff's image cannot presently be recorded or captured by any means besides by artwork and by biological eyes; neither photography, maia-captures, nor any form of machine-capture can process its

image. Red-things have been able to record its image, likely due to their biological makeup. The reason for this is unknown, though it may be a lost mark of the Evercold.

The Castoff is guarded closely by its three Coterie, who

ensure that it can never return to the Silvergreens. Unlike many Coterie, these three have lost much of their ability to understand the minds of most others, having been altered by the mind of the Castoff.[8] They may express amorous desires to those

who approach; they seem to be expressing desire on behalf of the Castoff, though never to targets the Castoff would consider appropriate.[9]

The Castoff and its Coterie were together imprisoned by Jailors during a local war in 1454, but have since

passed into the captivity of the Rose Guard.

First, they took your name, as they did for all they found. Second, they branded your wings and bound your feet, so that you would never run again. Third, they shore off your ears, and trimmed those remaining with mocking-gold. Finally, they carved your face with skyglass, delighted that you never ceased to bleed.[10]

All this, your reward, served in plenty over three-hundred years, but not nearly enough. Only the wind can comfort you now, fading spirit, and then only in her pity. —From "Wild's Answers", by the Hills of Silvergreens.

1: From *Lost Revenants*, by obscured authors. This fragment discovered in Prussia in the aftermath of the local "Thirteen Years' War" and returned to the Library by the Association of Wanderers.

2: The Castoff has a fundamental connection to the Library. It is forbidden for the Archivists to speak further on this; if one wishes to learn the nature of this connection, one must do their own research.

3: See *Fauna and Flora*, by Lost Eurydice. Because of this relation, the Castoff is sometimes euphemistically referred to as the Casting of Chloris.

4: In those times Shoal-Light had influence stretching across nearly all the worlds, though these ties were severed forever on its demise. The remnants of the place that did not become the Silvergreens are referred to as Old Shoal-Light, and are dangerous paths to tread.

5: Both Chloris and Marsyas escaped the Shoal-Light's burning; Chloris' present fate is unknown, and Marsyas is said to have been flayed several times afterwards, though this is not true, for they merely removed his then-worn second-skin.

6: Most surviving followers of Chloris believe that the Castoff betrayed the Shoal-Light only to be betrayed in turn by the Evercold, and feel great anger towards it. They have tried to heal the other survivors of Shoal-Light's burning, without success.

7: The Castoff hides its memories well, but those who approach may often see

visions of the blasted Dry Lake before the Silvergreens overgrew it.
8: The Coterie may change form as they like, but do so rarely and in a responsive manner; however, they always retain their helmets (for to them they are like clothing) and their eyes are always cold if seen.
9: The Castoff is unable to produce more children regardless, barring successful reincarnation.
10: The Evercold might have done more, but the Shoal-Light only burned for three hundred years.

Those Places Where Maps Cannot Touch

These are the sacred places. The places we can be free. Though the Jailors' sight feels infinite, nobody can see forever. These are their blind spots, where we can finally live our lives without fear of being captured and imprisoned. The hidden places, on the edge of worlds. The places where maps cannot touch.

The first city to change was Othrunda, and the first part of that was the center garden. A caretaker had woken up one day and found the wild vines and branches converted to smooth marble. The stone spread slowly in the beginning, creeping along the streets and alleys, ensnaring buildings, pets, and people. When the rest of the world took notice, the city had already been completely changed, and the stone was spreading beyond.

The ruler's empire fell slowly but surely. Desreda, Illiut, Porstorix, each land was consumed and absorbed by the pox. All the magic and power at his disposal wasn't enough to stop its advance. It advanced without halt to every corner of his world, save for one. His castle remained untouched, until now. Every one of his kingdoms has been destroyed. The marble is encircling his fortress. He cannot sleep because of the sound of it cracking the earth. He cannot protect himself. He can only drink his wine, and wait for the stone to come.

On another Earth, beneath the cities and garbage and pollution and violence and waste, God sleeps. Eventually He will wake. One day He will emerge from the ground and purge the world of those who have corrupted its beauty. The sky will come alive and devour the steel that infects it. The oceans will overflow. Humanity will beg for forgiveness.

Until then, he sleeps. But the sleep of God is not to be taken lightly. It warps and changes the world around it. The differences are

minute, but they are there. A man walking to work goes down the same street endlessly. A bluejay sitting on a fence splits, amoeba-like, into two birds. Then those birds split, until the entire fence and yards is covered with a chirping, multiplying blue swarm. Children come to school and find a dead angel teaching their class. A dog envisions a flying machine, and its masters wake to discover it building an ornithopter.

God turns over in his place of rest and continues to dream.

Far beyond, there is a great ocean. Some would say it is the greatest ocean- vast and powerful and churning, long ago having eroded any land in its path. Its depths are vast and uncharted. The horrors that lurk inside are unknown to the simple people who live on the surface in their floating boat-cities. They live peaceful lives above the waves, farming the grass and plants that grow there and catching the animals unlucky enough to come near.

One day, a shadow appears under the boat. The people are entranced by it. Many come to the edges of their boats to stare and wonder what great beast could create such a thing. It stays for many moons, following the boats as they drift through the sea. The novelty of it soon runs out, and the boat-people resume their simple lives. And when they do, the shadow moves.

It begins with a noise. A great howling noise, like wind through a massive tunnel. The water rises. The boats are lifted up by the swell. A massive hand rushes upward from the sea, grabbing them, then sinks back below the waves, taking the boat-people with it. The ocean is still again.

A thousand universes away, there exists a garden. Nobody knows how long it has existed, or if there ever was a point in time when it didn't. A few more people than nobody know that it exists at all. It floats through space, undisturbed and peaceful.

A rocket approaches it. On the rocket is a man, the last survivor of a humanity that has destroyed itself. Like the garden, nobody knows how long he has been floating through the emptiness, only that it

has been a long, long time. It drifts, slowly, into the garden, and lands between the flowers. A light goes on inside. A door opens inside. The man stumbles out. He takes in his surroundings with tired eyes- the beautiful blue and red and yellow flowers, the animals crawling through the foliage, the insects that hum through the air. He pushes his way through the bushes, the thorns that scratch against his face, steps over a thin brook, bubbling and full of fish, and finds himself in a clearing. In the center of it is a tall gray statue of a man. The statue is covered in moss and crawling animals, and as he looks upon it, he knows that he'll be happy here.

Far away, so many miles that it would be impossible to measure, there is a great machine. It was built in the distant past, by a race that it has long since destroyed, for purposes that nobody remembers. The planet that it rests on is dead, existing only as fuel for its belly-fire. It is being eroded slowly by the massive gears and scoops. Every day, a great claw will extend from the metal and take a large scoop of earth. No one knows what happens to the taken earth, and few want to, but at the end of the day, the great machine will shudder, and emit a thick belch of smoke. Sometimes, there will be other things. Once a man emerged from the machine. He took a few shaky steps onto the surface of the planet before collapsing, dead. Another time a second, smaller machine flew out, and disappeared into the sky. Most recently, a steel bird flapped out, and now circles the machine, screaming.

In a many years the planet will collapse. What the machine will do then, no one knows. Perhaps it will find another world to fuel its existence. Perhaps it will collapse back into scrap. But until then, it will continue to consume earth and spew smoke.

In a distant time and place, there exists a theater. Once it was a lively place, attended by people from every corner of the world. Kings and queens, lords and merchants, criminals and beggars. The performances were spectacular, unmatched by those in any other theater that has ever or will ever exist. Many thought it would exist forever. Sadly, it did not.

Now, the halls and stages are empty, home only to memories. The

props are dusty and worn. The costumes are ripped. The lights are broken. A small, round thing floats through the air. It whirs as it flies, powered by stray atoms it scoops from the air and converts to fuel. It is here to observe the lost theater. Who sent it, it cannot remember. If it could remember, it probably wouldn't care. What matters is the data: pictures, measurements, and samples that it will collect.

A noise from the right grabs its attention. Floating into the offending room, it sees something unexpected- a woman, climbing onto the broken stages. She stands motionless for a moment, with her eyes closed. Then she looks straight at the machine. A smile comes to her lips. From a source the machine cannot identify, music starts to play. The woman holds her arms in front of her, takes a step forward, and begins to dance.

Close to all of these, and also very far away, exists a Library. In the library there is a man. The man is sitting at a desk, with two books and a pen. One of them is small, and full of words. The other is large, and empty. He treats both with care as he turns through their pages. Every so often, he will lean in close to the small book. Then he will take his pen, dip it in the inkwell, and write a word in the large book. The word then disappears, absorbed into the pages, and he continues to read. Sometimes a patron will pass and ask what he's doing, but he'll ignore them. There is no reason to stop for fools. This is his life's work, and soon it will be complete. Soon, the world will know his name.

Vultures

Related by The Shad, member of the Serpent's Upraised Middle Finger:

Siddown, kid, and lemme tell you a fundamental truth about the Foundation.

It's run by vultures. SCP stands for Special Carrion Procedures.

Yes, vultures! Don't sit there with yer mouth open like a lunatic! I know, it sounds crazy, but I got it *all* figured out.

Oh, come on now, they wear people suits, obviously! Why, I reckon that if you took off their clothes, you could see the zipper—not that you'd want to get a skipper naked, 'cause a skipper's most dangerous when naked. Skippers strike when you least expect it, son.

Anyway. I reckon they're *Vulch sapiens*—the wise vulture. Nasty pieces of work, them, and they'll swear up and down that they're really people. But they aren't. They're *vultures*.

Don't know quite what they look like, but I reckon that they look long an' thin, with scrawny wings—hafta be scrawny, to fit in the suit's arms—an' they probably have a pink wrinkly head like a buzzard. I reckon they're cousins twice removed, them and the buzzards.

Proof? Oh, I got proof. I got proof… *I got proof that'll make you weep*.

The D-Class program was where I began to figure it all out. See, I've got inside knowledge, and lemme tell you, the D-Class program ain't just cruel, it's downright *stupid*—well, unless you're a vulture, I guess. There are dozens of things they use the D-Class for that they could just use those robots for. Why do they have D-Class clean out places instead of use robots for the cleaning? Why do they use D-

Class to explore new places instead of robots?

Took me a while to figure it out, but finally I hit upon the truth of the matter: They're eating the dead bodies. Oh, they type it up nice and dandy, making it sound like those D-Class just vanish, but they eat 'em. Every last one they can. They take the ones people won't miss, and then they put them in situations where they'll die, and then they eat 'em. What did you *think* happen to the bodies? Incineration? *Burial*? That's why they gas them, too. Leaves 'em intact for eating.

In my mind, I can see it. Dozens of vultures, their suit heads flopping against their backs, tugging at dead D-Classes with their beaks. Thousands of carcasses, all lined up as far as the eye can see. The damn skippers probably make them into damn dishes. Like D-Class fricassee. Vultures wearing chef hats.

Vultures are behind everything, sonny. And I don't just mean *Vulch sapiens*. Wars, famine, disease… *vultures* be the ones who benefit, and *they're always there*. They try to pass it off as just their nature. Don't fool me, though. Sneaky bastards. They farm us like cattle, and we don't even notice. We just think it's part of life. So we're blind to their evil.

Wherever we are, those damn birds follow. Even in the cities they swarm buildings. And lemme tell you, there are a *bunch* wherever the Foundation goes, spying for them. They get some carcasses too, I reckon. Probably try and negotiate for more carcasses all the time in exchange for them being spies.

Third clue: Very nature of the vultures themselves. Vultures *follow* me. They're tracking me, and they're doing it more and more since I figured it out, 'cause I'm on to them. I mean, to some extent they follow everybody, yeah, just like I said, but they follow me *more*. Not just when I'm walking around in the desert, either. They follow me to the farmer's market and hop around eating my groceries, they roost on my car and eat the wiper rubber, they sit on my lawn and eat the flowers. Damn things are trying to make me crash by eating my wipers. 'Cause it rains down here, and it rains *hard*.

When they started, I knew they was on to me. So I went into my basement, and I set up my very own interrogation room. Then I went

and purchased this here Taser, which I've used to stun every goddamn vulture I come across. Then I tie them to a chair in my interrogation room and interrogate them. So far, the damn things are loyal to the Foundation, and I haven't managed to pry any of their vulture secrets from their beaks. I've tried the standard interrogation techniques, even waterboarding.

But I'll come up with something to make them talk, at least eventually.

'Cause vultures ain't no match for The Shad, son.

Wanderers

June 30th, 1967

Mortimer,

Although I expect you burned this letter as soon as you saw my name on the envelope, I feel it necessary to at least try to contact you, and as this is a matter of most importance, humbly beg that you consider my words. You see, I may have found a way to revive the Hand.

I know you will resist this idea, but there is no reason to think history will repeat itself. We were barely teenagers, without the vision or maturity needed to recreate such a magnificent thing as the Hand. Now we are older, wiser, and better trained. I have traveled this world and many others, gathering my knowledge and skills, and imagine you have done similar. With our combined experience, and my most recent discovery, we have all the necessary tools at our disposal.

What is this discovery? Nothing short of the center of all universes. It may sound dramatic, but those are the only words I have to succinctly describe it. Do you remember years ago, reading the works of Crowley and Spare under the moonlight, coming across repeated mentions of a great Library? It puzzled us then, and I have wondered what they meant ever since. Now I have found out.

I found it while traversing the Conqueror's Desert. I stopped for the night in a large cave, and went to sleep. When I woke up, I found I had been transported to far different place- I and my sleeping mat were stuck on top of a towering shelf. I yelled for help, and soon an oddly shaped, multi-armed man arrived and helped me to the ground. Asking around, I found that this place was called “The Wanderer's Library”, a resting place for knowledge in all its forms.

And what knowledge it was! I found books detailing all sorts of

things, the kind of things we always looked for as children but could never find. Rituals, bestiaries, journals, all there. I found the notebook of a butler behemoth, and letters sent between two gods from different universes, and a detailed account of the rule of a cabbage king, and so much more, all on a single shelf. There are millions of shelves it seems- filled with almost anything you could ever want. It is the type of place we dreamed of as children.

It took me three weeks to find my way back to this world. Since then, I've spent a total of six months in the Library, and discovered thirty doorways to it scattered through various realms. I expect there are many, many more.

The people in the Library are varied, coming from all manner of places and times. Many of them are hunted, as we once were, by men who hope to destroy or suppress what makes them marvelous. The Library for them is a safe space. I propose this- we reform the Hand a second time, using our since acquired knowledge to help ensure its survival, and the Library as a way to keep ourselves safe. I have contacted Margaret, Dominique, Jessie, Anna, and Zelazny, and all responded enthusiastically. Many have already begun preparations- Anna trying to recontact the Spirits of the Plains, Dominique purchasing terrestrial safehouses for us, and so on. Please, Mortimer. You know I never meant to do what I did, or expected what followed. The crime I committed was unforgivable, and I don't expect you to simply forget about it. By all rights, you should have killed me for what I did. But now I beg, on my knees, for the sake of the people we would be able to protect, that you set aside those events, at least for now. Never before have I felt such joy as I did together with you in our youth. I wish only to recapture some of those halcyon days, and for a chance to make up for my crimes. Though we will continue with or without you, as my oldest friend and original partner, I hope you will again join me in creating something beautiful.

Yours if you'll have me,

James

Your Father's Son

When I heard Ed's wife scream, I wasn't quite sure what to make of it. I thought, for a second, that someone was trying to break in, and it amused me. Whoever broke into this house would be in for a treat—especially on tonight, of all nights. And then I heard cold voices shouting "This is the police! Get down!" I felt a chill pass through me—I looked over at Ed and I knew that he knew. The jig was up. The Foundation was here.

Ed looked at me then, totally calm. That's why he was the boss, because no matter what, he kept his cool. Back then I was little more than a kid myself. I can't imagine I'd have kept it together then. I can't imagine I'd have kept it together now.

Ed looked at me and said, "Take my son. Go. I'll meet you in the Library," except I knew he was lying. He'd never get to his wife in time. He'd damn sure try though. People that get caught up in Foundation shit, they don't come back right. Memories are all gone, but something else is wonky, too. Like they take out your soul. Suck the life right out of you. That's what Ed—well, some things are better saved 'till later.

Ed bolted. He knew it was too late. I saw it in his eyes. But damn, if he wasn't gonna try. I looked at you then—you were young. Five, maybe. Scared, too. Who wouldn't be, hearin' their mommy scream bloody murder, and then their daddy boltin' into the night. I wish I'd had time to say something—I know kid, I know—but there wasn't. There was a bolthole dug into the ground, covered by a grating. I shoved you in, and pushed you along, and then got down after you. Barely more than two feet high that was—lucky you I was a younger man.

You were sobbing now, as we crawled. I could hear sirens above us and muttering voices. There was only a grating between us and them, and I had to hope that none of the agents had to tie a shoe or look down to spit or anything. They call me Lucky Bill, but I've never

been luckier than that night.

We popped out a block down, and I grabbed you immediately and started running. I could hear the sirens branching out now—they knew we had gone, but they didn't know where. What? No, they were looking for you, not me. A man will do anything for his son, and your father—he knew a lot of shit. A lot of stuff the Foundation wanted to know.

You were full on crying now, as we ran. Screaming for your father and mother. I don't blame you, fuck, who'd blame a five year old for that? But I could hear sirens moving closer all the while. I dragged you into an alley an pushed you up against a wall and looked you in the eyes. I said "Shut the fuck up kid." An' other things I'm not proud of. I told you we were goin' somewhere safe, and you'd see your parents eventually. But we had to get to that safe place first.

I wish I could say I hadn't done that before, or that I'd never do it again. But the fuckin' truth of it is that the Hand deals with a lot of orphans. It's part of the business. A lot of us have families, and when you fight a war, families die. Our escape was one of the easiest ones I've done. The worst is when you have t' pull the kid away from his dead mother or father. Truth is, you had it kinda easy.

That's the story, more or less. I got you back to the Door and managed to knock before Gammel tore my head off. I wish to hell an' back that hadn't been your first time in the Library. It's glorious in there, and no one should 'ave to run in, with hellhounds an' worse on their heels.

I still go and visit your father sometimes, even though I shouldn't. He's a regular at a pub—no, I'm not gonna tell you where, you little masochist. Thinks I'm a construction worker. He's doing better now, and he's out of that shithole Detroit, so don't go looking. Sometimes I think he almost recognizes me, but—well, that's neither here nor there.

Writing Prompts

Wanderlust

Write about getting lost. Write about not being able to be find something, or trying not to. Write about walking and wandering and looking for yourself (or others).

Give 'Em the Old Razzle Dazzle

"Bar? Bar, where are you? Barfrazzleton, get out here this instant, I need you." Hennington Hargrave, sorcerer supreme, narrowed his eyes as he looked around the room.

"It's Buttercup," said a little red devil. "Bar is… Bar's not here, sir."

"Not here? He's my familiar. He can't simply *not* be here."

"I'm your familiar, sir." The little red face looked up at him with mournful eyes.

"No, you aren't. I want…" Hargrave's brow furrowed. "Where am I? I have to be on stage soon. It's opening night, Bar. I'm sure the stage is around here somewhere, but I seem to have gotten lost. I haven't played this theater before, I don't think. Help me find the stage, will you?"

"Yes sir," the devil said.

"Thank you, Barfrazzleton. I'd be lost without you."

The little red creature guided him down the halls. It was half-familiar, but not quite. There were pictures of an old man everywhere. Hagrave stopped to look at one, and was surprised when it moved. He lifted his hand, and it moved with his. He laughed.

"Bar, look at this clever picture. It moves when I move. Did I make that?"

The familiar winced. Why did he have horns? Monkeys weren't supposed to have horns. Devils had horns. He'd thought about getting a devil familiar once, but he'd gone with a monkey instead. Good old Barfrazzleton. "Yes sir. Very clever. Now come on, it's time for your medicine."

"Medicine? But I have to get to the stage. Come now, the show must

go on." Hargrave looked in vain for the gaslights. Or, no, they all used electric now. Safer, but it wasn't quite the same.

"Yes sir, but first, you have to take your medicine." The little devil tugged on his sleeve.

"Oh. Very well. But then to the stage. I mustn't keep the audience waiting. They've paid good money, you know. My shows are *not* cheap."

"Of course not, sir," the devil said solemnly.

"It's like I always say, Bar, a performer should never charge less than he's worth, and never give less than he charges."

"Very wise. Right here, sir." The little imp led him into a bathroom. It used a stool to clamber up on the sink, and then opened up a medicine cabinet. There were an awful lot of bottles.

It pulled out a little tray with columns of S M T W T F S and rows of Morn Noon Eve Bed on it. It carefully opened W Noon and pulled out a handful of pills. It picked up a glass from beside the sink and filled it with water. "Here, sir. Take your medicine now, then we can go to the stage."

Hargrave picked up the pills, then threw them to the floor. "What are you trying to do, poison me? I'm not a druggie! I'm clean! Where's Bar? I want Bar this instant!"

The little devil shut its eyes for a moment, then composed itself. "Bar will… Bar will be back soon. I need you to take your medicine first, though. Please."

"Medicine! How do I know it's not drugs? Or poison! You're working for Franz, aren't you? Tell that hack I won't play his game! I'm my own man, and I don't do that any more. I never liked it before he started using children, and I damn sure won't do it now."

"I don't work for Franz. This is… It's special pills. To help with anxiety. Before the show."

"Anxiety? I…" Hargrave stopped and paused. "Bar, these are my

anxiety pills? Now look what you've done. You dropped them all over the floor, you silly monkey."

"I'm sorry, sir." The poor familiar sounded positively melancholy.

"Oh, it's all right," Hargrave said, feeling bad he'd been so hard on the poor monkey. His familiar always did his best, and never talked in front of the normals. He should be tolerant of a little spill. "I'll help you pick them up, and then we'll take the stage. What do you say?"

"Sounds… Sounds very good, sir."

"Oof. My back's terribly sore. It mast have been one hell of a night. Did you catch her name by any chance?" He gave the familiar a leer. Barfrazzleton was always so innocent. Hargrave couldn't help but poke a little fun.

"I'm afraid not, sir." Bar was obviously trying to play it cool, but he was so red, it was obvious he was embarrassed. Odd Hargrave could see it through his fur, but no matter.

"We'll knock them dead tonight. I've got some new tricks. There's one where I'll put a blanket over you and…"

"Turn me into a giraffe?" the familiar said.

"Oh. Have I told you about it already? I was sure I was going to surprise you. Yes, and they'll wonder about smoke, and mirrors, and never know it for the real thing. Hide in plain sight. That's the key." Hargrave swallowed the pills down and finished them with the water. "Gah. Terrible stuff. But I can't have any nerves tonight. I don't know if I've told you this before, but a performer should never charge less than he's worth, and never give less than he charges."

"Yes sir," Bar said. "This way, sir."

Hargrave smiled as the familiar led him on. He looked over at some of the old posters on the walls. Cairo, that was a good one. Budapest. He couldn't remember the performance in Munich, but he must have done well there. Someone had kissed the corner, leaving lipstick. He could just make out the preservation charm to keep it intact. It must have meant something to him, but he couldn't quite

call it to mind at the moment.

As they walked through a room filled with books and comfortable chairs and places where liquor should have been, he stopped.

"Buttercup?" he said.

"Y-yes sir?"

"Why are we in the study?" he asked.

"Just… just taking a walk, sir."

"Oh. Well, that's good. I can use all the exercise I can stand at my age. I must have drifted there. I was thinking about Bar."

"Oh?"

"I miss him, you know. Barfrazzleton McGillicuddy, the monkey marvel. He was a great familiar."

"Yes sir," Buttercup said. She looked down.

"Oh, not that you aren't an excellent familiar too, Buttercup! Why… Honestly, I think I'd be lost without you."

A Restless Wanderer On The Earth

Now

"A *possible* memory?" Bluebird frowned at the oblong glass shard in the Merchant's hand. "Why would I pay so much for a possible memory?"

The Merchant smiled a little instead of replying. Bluebird found this Merchant was always a little exasperating; she always had this smug, detached attitude. But she still managed to be adorable. As adorable as one of Dark's people could ever be, anyway.

"Two reasons," the Merchant said. "One, the age. You will find that the age of this possible memory is in the uncountable aeons."

"I'm not convinced," Bluebird said. "I've paid for many an ancient memory that contained nothing but unsurpassed dullness. And this is a possible memory. So it may be altered in any number of irritating ways."

"Then the second reason." The Merchant smiled. "The one from whom this possible memory was acquired."

Bluebird folded zir arms to emphasize zir skepticism. "Who?"

The Merchant opened a small lamp and focused it until it emitted only a single ray of light, especially bright in the dim fog of the Shadow Market. She rubbed the shard and held it up to the ray of light. "Look and see."

Bluebird leaned over to look. Zir eyes widened as zie saw the images dancing through the murky glass.

"Yes," Bluebird said. "I will pay for this. I will pay whatever you ask, for this."

Then

The man found Cain ben Adam in the endless wildernesses of the between-places. The man was beautiful to look upon, with bronzed skin and shaggy black hair. His clothing was cut of animal skin, of fashions pleasing to the eye. But Cain was not pleased to see him.

The man knew his name.

"I am a priest," the man said. "A year ago, you passed through my village. I wished to follow you then, but I was held back by the others. Then the crop failed, and a plague swept through our village. Only I was able to save myself, and then, there were none to hold me back. I have searched for you since, and now I have finally found you."

Cain frowned. He tried to wander only those lands where the soil was wild and suffused with power enough to resist his curse, or else lands where the inhabitants knew how to refresh the lands which his curse had made barren.

When he needed to pass through civilization, he avoided the fields. He had long ago discovered that his curse had a limit — forty-eight cubits around him, or a length similar to twelve times his own height. Enough to judge with the naked eye.

But that did not account for the times he was not fully aware. Often, taken with wanderlust, sometimes not even fully awake, he would walk in a trance according to where his feet took him alone. After these periods, he could awake having destroyed the entire harvest for a village.

"I am truly sorry," Cain said.

The man looked astonished. "You are Cain, the Wanderer, father of the Lost Children and the Great Beasts. You are the god of death. The other gods, the lesser gods, could not save my village. I worshiped them once. I despise them, now. I come now to worship you."

"They were your family," Cain said. "Even if they were not, I cannot

be pleased about bringing more death to those who did not deserve it."

"You are testing me, my lord." The man's teeth gleamed. "I promise you, I will not disappoint you. I will become your follower, and your priest!"

"Foolish," Cain said, and continued walking.

The man followed him.

In The Beginning

For long after the branding, Cain told himself that nothing had changed. His curse would not matter. He would make it not matter. He swallowed his sorrow and guilt and resolved to carry on.

He went to the land of Nod, the wandering land. There his curse could not touch the land, for it was too wild to even support crops, and the life there too resilient and alien.

Dwelling there seemed to calm the wanderlust that had suffused him since the branding. He would build a life in Nod, he determined, a settled, stable life, and it would be as if nothing had happened.

And Cain found, to his surprise, that he did not age. His metal parts did not rust nor decay, his skin did not wrinkle, his hair did not turn grey. His memory, though hazy when it came to his childhood and the time before the branding, now never faded in clarity. The only sign of his aging was when his brown eyes faded and shifted to become bright blue.

He was as invulnerable to the ravages of time as he was to the weapons of man. Truly, his curse was no curse at all.

Then

The man followed Cain through the wilderness, sustaining himself with his priest's arts. But, emotionally, he began to come undone.

"They deserved to die, all of them," he said. "Inanna was a whore. Aya was false. Belshunu beat me with sticks when I was young. And all of them refused to let me choose my own path. Chains of words, but chains nonetheless. We need you, they said. They needed to *use* me. Let them rot in their graves!"

Cain never answered.

"Why do you remain silent?" the man asked. His face was flushed with anger.

"I have said all there is to say," Cain said. "And you should not speak ill of the dead."

"Perhaps you are right," the man said. "Perhaps they did not deserve to die. Perhaps you are not a god at all."

Cain was silent, watching him clench and unclench his fists. The sun beat down overhead.

"If you are not a god, then you are a demon. And *you* deserve to die." He hefted his stout metal walking-stick. "We will see if the stories are true. Or perhaps I will put an end to you now!"

Cain stood still as the man came at him. He took the blow from the stick, and felt the pain, but was, as always, unmoved. His assailant toppled backwards and sat on the ground, stunned.

Cain looked at the man as he sat on the ground, looking up at him, gawking. Fortunately, the blow had not been well-struck. The man would suffer only aches and bruises, no broken bones.

"I am not a god," Cain said. "Perhaps I am a demon. But nonetheless, I cannot fall by your hand."

He returned to walking. After some time, the man got up and followed him.

In The Beginning

In the land of Nod, the more Cain settled, the more the mark on his

forehead stirred. The wandering urge grew stronger in his breast, but he ignored it.

Instead, he erected more cities. The cities grew and prospered. His curse could not extend through the Ways that filled Nod. Therefore, he built his cities around Nexii of Ways. Those who lived in his cities traveled through these Ways to tend fields in Sumer proper, and in other lands just as fertile.

Still the urge to wander increased. And the nightmares came too, sometimes every night for months. He would wake up, sobbing, incoherent, inconsolable.

He remembered every variation of his sin that he had ever performed, past, present, and future. He remembered every possible color of his brother's blood. *What have you done to me,* the corpse of his brother would ask. *What have you done.*

He would be like this forever, he realized. Forever living with this sorrow and regret.

Cain became filled with a fury unquenchable. He raged against the heavens. *This is your fault. Yours!*

Nod was filled with abandoned works from the dead Ancient Ones. Weapons with which Cain, Friend of the Ancient Ones, was more than familiar. He built off these to create new weapons of war for humanity. He could not fully reanimate their dead works, but he created new ways of working metal to compensate. With the treasures he received in exchange for these weapons, he built more cities, larger cities, and once he had enough large cities, he began to raise armies.

He lead these armies in wars. He stood against monstrous enemies, and laughed as their weapons destroyed their wielders as they battered his body. Whole civilizations fell before him. After, he used his curse to defile their lands.

Yet he was still filled with misery. The more death he was responsible for, the more his misery grew, buttressed by the eternally perfect memory of everything he had done.

Then

Still the man followed Cain. Both his worshipfulness and his rage were past.

"I admit it," the man said. "I loved them. I did weep for their passing. I only tried to hide it because I wished to please you."

Cain was silent.

"You have powers beyond those of any mortal," the man said. "You can bring them back. All of them. It can return to the way it was."

"I cannot reverse death," Cain said. "My curse does not grant me such a boon. Would that it did."

"Surely you can. Surely you are testing me. What must I do to earn this favor?"

"I cannot bring them back," Cain said.

"It must be a small thing for one such as you," the man said. "Please."

"I cannot bring anyone back."

"I will travel the lands and bring you riches. My healer's powers can bring me much treasure in a great city. I can work and bring it all to you. I can be your manservant — no, your willing slave, to do with as you will. I can be your emissary, your herald, your priest. I will do anything."

"There is nothing that you or I can do."

"Please."

Cain was silent.

In The Beginning

Cain resolved to cease the shedding of blood.

He could not infuriate the heavens this way. Only disappoint them. But perhaps he could please the heavens instead. Perhaps, then, his curse would become more bearable.

He would become a patriarch like his father. He would do his father better. He would become what Abel could have been. He would build cities which would last for all time.

To be a true patriarch, he would need a family. Not a family of the Children borne of the blood he had spilled, nor the Lost Children who came after. No. He needed a family that would be acknowledged by those who hated him.

Nor could he begin a family with the men he loved; no, they would not do. He considered, briefly, the men who could bear him children, the ones thought women by the traditional patriarchs like his father. No, they would not do either; his father would see them as women who thought themselves men, and would pass judgment harshly. No, he would need an ordinary woman, one who was seen as a woman by all the people of the land, and a fertile woman who could bear children. And then likely other wives as well, of the same fashion.

The ease in which this was accomplished was surprising. Within only a few years, Cain had a wife, and a son. A son named Enoch. He named a city after this son.

His son had children. Their children had children. Cain's cities grew.

The wandering urge grew stronger. He began to suffer from tremors, shaking upon the earth, sometimes for days at a time. He began to sleepwalk, wandering far outside of his cities before waking in the dawn light and returning.

Then

The man still followed Cain. They trudged through snow and sleet in the in-between lands.

The man was silent, now, breaking silence only with occasional choking sobs. He had long ceased to eat and drink, using his healer's arts to mindlessly sustain himself. He hardly lifted his head, only putting one foot in front of the other, in Cain's footsteps.

They reached the cold shoals of the eternal sea, the sea called Never. Cain began work on building a boat.

The man could not help him in the boat-building, but Cain did not want the help; the techniques to create and forge this sort of metal boat were totally alien to this man. Cain had long experience with them; he had spent much time on the seas, where his curse had little effect.

When the boat was finished, the man boarded the boat with him. Cain did not object, only handed him an oar. They floated forth on the wintry sea.

The man muttered words between frozen tears. "I should have… I should have been a better son… a better husband… a better healer… a better human being…"

Cain was silent.

"I did it. I killed them. By abandoning them, I killed them as surely as if I had done it with my own two hands… I was the healer. They relied on me. I could have saved them, or at least some of them. But I left. If only I had stayed…"

They were on the sea for a long time.

In The Beginning

To stop his insensate wanderings, Cain had himself chained up in Enoch's palace. The wandering urge lessened and slowed, but became ever-present, a steady, horrible beat under his heart. His children and grandchildren tried to please him in his prison, but Cain found himself unable to feel almost anything. His days passed in an empty stupor, with neither pleasure or pain, beyond the ache on his forehead and in his chest.

The land of Nod changed and shifted. First one of Cain's cities was destroyed, then another. Cain found himself feeling that this, too, was a punishment from the Elohim, but he could hardly feel enough to care.

Then the end came for the city of Enoch, too. Cain was still in chains under the palace when it collapsed on his head.

He felt the pain, but did not die. Instead, he lived, trapped immobile deep in the rubble of the ancient city. Perhaps, he thought, he would be here forever. Perhaps this was his final punishment.

Then

When they reached the terrestrial planes again, and the boat ran aground on a new shore, the man looked up for the first time in a long while. The sun was rising. They watched it together.

There was a city on the horizon, suffused with golden light.

"This is where we part ways," Cain said. "I will not go to the sun-city today. But you should."

"What will I do?" the man asked.

"You have mourned your family," Cain said. "Lay them to rest. Build shrines in their honor. And find another people. Heal others, as you did not heal your village. In this way, you can begin to atone."

"I will," the man said.

The man walked towards the city. Cain watched him until his form dwindled away.

In The Beginning

Cain's children came to him, under the earth. They whispered things to him. Secrets. Prophecies. For a long time, he ignored them.

And then he began to listen.

After some time his children came, silently, to unearth and free him. A great many of the Lost Children came, even the First, the High Golem.

As he picked his way through the rubble of his former life, he found that his human family was long dead. His cities were gone, only ruins left, swallowed by the lush and roiling wilderness of the wandering land of Nod.

The Lost Children told Cain the paths he needed to follow. He listened.

He would accept his curse. He would wander the worlds, until he found all the possible ways to atone for his sins. If peace for him was still possible, then this was how he would find peace.

Cain followed the paths, embracing the wanderlust, stepping into the wider world.

Now

Bluebird left the Shadow Market, zir eyes wide and head held high, the possible memory in glass tucked in zir long coat.

Zie opened a Way to another world, and stepped through.

After The Cave Was Explored

After the cave was explored, we searched.
We searched through the darkness of the vast chasms,
The endless depths,
The cold, damp air,
And we found the Gods.
After the world was explored, we searched.
We searched the wide and wild continents,
The thick jungle,
The icy poles,
The vast, burning deserts,
And we found our Brothers.
After the sky was explored, we searched.
We searched the open blue expanse
The dizzying heights,
The thick clouds,
The cool, thin air,
And we found the Angels.
After the void was explored, we searched.
The eternal dark,
The strange worlds,
The massive fiery suns,
And we found the Kings.
We still search.
We will find you.
We have not forgotten what you have done.

Topinambour

> 17:3 So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.
>
> 17:4 And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:
>
> 17:5 And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

When the gatekeeper stared at her filth-smeared face, she knew she would not be granted passage. Not without prices she was unable to pay.

“So,” he said, his voice jagged like a saw, “you think this gives you right to enter my City.” He still clutched her medallion in front of him. Dirt from his fingertips stained the white metal. She shuddered at the sight and looked away. To respond would grant this small man another victory. She would not debase herself so.

Sneering, he continued. “This is not a place for you. Perhaps in many years, when I have left my post and the Words of our King have been forgotten, this will allow you through these walls.” He flicked the medallion forward. It spun in the air and landed half-buried in the mud. “Come back with proper coinage.”

Like a snake she struck, whipping the knife forward, slicing through his throat. He gurgled, frothing grey blood pouring from the wound, took a step forward, then another, then fell. She knelt to pick up the medallion, restrung it around her neck, and stepped through the crumbling walls into the City.

When she entered the store, the shopkeeper opened his mouth to tell her to leave. When he saw the medal at her neck, he fell to his knees.

“O Mother,” he cried, head bowed, “O Mother, I am not worthy. This City is not worthy. Please Mother, leave this place, so you are tainted no more by our presence. I beg of you, Mother.”

She knelt beside him and placed a hand upon his cheek.

“My child,” she said, “Do you not see? You have remained faithful, and that makes you more worthy than all the rest.”

He wept, and nodded, and did not lift his forehead from the floor. “O mother, thank you, thank you. What is it you would have your son do?”

And the corners of her lips twisted to a smile. “Child,” she said, “we will make this City ours.”

She stood with her only son, watching from the rooftop and men fought and screamed and died below. Steel and bronze ripped muscle apart, skulls buckled under knotted clubs, arrows pierced unarmored flesh, until the pavement was invisible under the bodies and blood and gore. Still the men fought on, two armies surging against each other like a bloody hurricane. It brought her joy to see.

“You have done well, to find me such skilled warriors,” she said.

Her son bowed his head. “Mother, I regret that this was all I could accomplish. We should have won this battle handedly.”

“Winning is enough,” she said, as her men beat back the enemy. Soon we will crush them, but until then they will feel our sting.” Many men tried to turn and run from her soldiers’ advance. Her archers put arrows into their backs as her army continued to march forward.

Later, she stood among the bodies, one of her captains approached her.

“Mistress,” he said, kneeling. “We have captured over a hundred enemy soldiers. Twenty Warlocks, thirty Twisted Men, and fifty Silverhearts. What would you have us do with the prisoners?”

She touched the medallion at her neck. Even after all these months, after being cleansed a hundred times, she could still feel the gatekeeper’s touch upon it.

“Kill them all.”

And when she had finally salted the streets with blood, and burned buildings to ash, and torn her enemies from their thrones, and butchered every man, woman, and child who opposed her, the city was a better place. She sent workers to rebuild, and when they were finished, the houses were better than before. She sent soldiers to patrol the walls, and no one dared invade her kingdom again. She opened the gates for the poor, and hungry, and sick. All were welcome in the streets of her City, for all were her children.

And it was not enough.

There were other cities, she knew. Lesser ones, though with great potential. She could almost taste them on the wind. And now, she had armies.

It was time to march.

The knotted serpent came in a dream, its black and white scales shimmering in the wasteland of her mindscape, twisting around her like a noose and whispering its dark language in her ear.

What have you done here, sister?

Are you here to pass judgement on me, brother?

The serpent grinned, the type of smile that could devour worlds.

Sister, if anyone could judge you it would not be I. But your work strikes me as peculiar.

Its coils tightened around her, and she could feel the snake's heart beat against her skin, and the heat of the fire it carried.

You do realize, Babylon is gone? Are you that desperate for what you have lost, that you will run so far for naught but an imitation, that you will pretend to be someone so much greater than yourself?

The tip of its tail brushed against the white medal.

That you still carry mother's gift with you?

She gritted her teeth and wished she could hurt him.

You know exactly how desperate I am.

The serpent cackled, and unwound itself from her.

Indeed I do, sister, and it brings me great joy. I hope your actions bring you the same, though I doubt it. Maybe one day when this is over you will join me below, for we have much to discuss.

And she awoke in sweat, and pounded her fists against the floor and cried out at the wind for the injustices spoken to her. But when the sun rose it was over, and she had work to attend.

Dee Equals Are Tee

The rope burns on my hands are making it harder and harder to hold on, to keep myself from falling off the edge of this cliff and quickly, inevitably, plunging to the rocks below. It makes me start to calculate things in my head to try and keep my mind from thinking of the pain. 'Dee equals are tee,' flicks through my head, but I'm not entirely sure what that means until I imagine it written out.

I'm at least three hundred feet up, and I think that things fall at the same speed. A rock near my foot pops free and tumbles down the side of the cliff. I count. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine…

Clack.

So, if D = RT, then three hundred divided by nine seconds, is thirty-three, repeating. I'll hit the ground at thirty-three miles a second? Is that right? That will almost certainly kill m— Wait. No. That's not right. That's assuming constant speed, but I'll be accelerating. God damn it, I wish I had paid more attention in physics…

I feel the wetness of blood trickling over my palms, and I find myself staring up the side of the cliff. Another thirty or forty feet. I can do this. I'm almost certain I can get up there. And once I do? Well, I've got food on my back for at least two more days. Someone can come looking for me. Flare gun. I'll be alive, and they can rescue me.

I remove one hand, and I put it above the other, gripping again and breathing in sharply at the pain. I added another foot to my rate-of-death calculation, and pulled myself upward, my body protesting every movement.

I weigh around two-twenty, and my gear — the stuff I absolutely have to have — weighs around thirty pounds. Pitons, rope, bag, shoes. Not the gloves though. I left those at home. Because I'm an idiot. As I start to climb, I begin to calculate my total weight. The

pocket knife in my pocket is a few ounces, and the tin cans of tuna and beans in my backpack are a few more. Next time, I'll use plastic pouches, since those are lighter.

If I could take off my pack and sort through it, hanging in the air and floating safely, I would be more systematic, but since I can't, I have to make do.

I must weigh at least fifty pounds more than normal, give or take. Fifty pounds, and two-twenty, so two-seventy. I'm pulling two hundred and seventy pounds up the cliff, half a foot each gain, trying to make thirty-five — let's average — feet. I can do that. I was benching plenty last week. I can't remember how much, but the personal trainer said it was plenty.

Fuck. The footholds are too far apart… I can either try and go back down, which is how I got into this mess in the first place, or I can try to power through it the rest of the way. How much would it take to get there? Pulling force…

I don't know. I can't keep my mind occupied anymore. Fifteen, maybe twenty, feet, and I have to power it. Shame the gym coach isn't here.

I never got high marks in math…

It's Good To Be Awake Again

Franklin worked every single day of the week, even on Tuesdays.

You know that was a bitch. He never complained, even when things didn't go according to routine. For example, today his shoes didn't fit anymore. Franklin hadn't grown for years, but it didn't matter. They wouldn't go on his feet, no matter what. In the end, the only footwear he owned that would fit turned out to be his loafers. They would have to do.

The seven o' clock was late again. Franklin didn't mind. It gave him more time to think. Thinking was one of Franklin's preferred activities. Sometimes, he thought about where the train might be. Perhaps, mayhap, in possibility, it had derailed again. The train hadn't actually ever derailed, even on the day back those months ago, when it seemed certain that it had, for how else would a train run two hours late? Of course, it hadn't been so. The train operator's wife had run off with another woman, and the operator had offed himself in the engine compartment. A nasty business, they hadn't cleared him out of the various nooks and crannies until the sun was over the home for the grannies.

The truth was much more of a fanciful tale than the simple derailment Franklin always postulated to himself. The train dropped him off at a grey station, with columns of marble and pillars exalting the workingman to do his duty. The color of infinity, otherwise known as black, speckled the otherwise featureless floor. Once, Franklin had seen a man selling a newspaper, but he hadn't been there the next day. On the street, it felt like rain. There wasn't a cloud in the sky, and the ground was as bare as could be, but the day just gave him that peculiar feeling. It persisted in spite of his brain's assurances that there was no rain, and in fact, there had not been a rainstorm for quite some time.

Turning around the boulevard, Franklin pulled his cap down over his eyes. With a not-quite-white coat, and crummy loafers, nice pair of

slacks, and a briefcase, he was doing a very impressive impression of being just like everybody else.

The workplace approached him. He pushed open the great marble doors, and stuffed himself inside. A doorman greeted him just inside the door. “Morning, Mister Stauffer. Looks like somebody’s running late again.”

Franklin muttered something that, in his mind, he hoped sounded obscene, but in reality just came out as illegible. As he did so, he turned his head so as not to accidentally make eye contact with the doorman, and as he did so, he saw it.

A cat.

It strutted past him, tail swishing proudly in the air, brushing past his leg before slipping out the door and back out onto the street. Franklin blinked. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d seen a tame animal, let alone a kitty cat. Without pausing to explain himself, he set his briefcase down upon the ground, and set off after the beast. The moment he stepped outside, something peculiar happened. Franklin’s loafers, which had previously enjoyed the luxury of being fixated on the earth, looked for the ground and missed. Before he knew it, Franklin found himself several feet above the surface, and gaining.

Franklin pondered this development. A few seconds ago, he might’ve flown into a panicked, but now the only thought that rushed through his head was “Gosh, I wonder if I’ll be able to spot that cat from up here?” A few feet later, he’d developed a nice, lazy drift heavenwards, high enough that he could peer into the window offices coveted by many and owned by few. The first one, on the second floor, wasn’t particularly interesting. Just a man wearing a suit much like Franklin’s, sitting and staring at the corner office’s front (and only) door.

The lucky officeholder apparently didn’t have the presence of mind turn to notice Franklin, not even once.

He must be enjoying himself, to have the space all to himself. I’m sure I’d bask in the importantness of it all too, if I were him. That was

Franklin's first thought. He changed his mind, though, when offices three through nineteen had men of much the same caliber doing much ado about nothing. The man in the twentieth office wasn't wearing any pants. But aside from that, he wasn't any different from the rest.

It was at this point that Franklin began to grow concerned. The ground was an awfully far way down, and he was running out of floors to peruse. There was absolutely no way he'd be able to see the cat from all the way up here. So, he tried to swim down. Franklin had never been a terribly strong swimmer, even when he was in water, so of course his first attempt to try and swim his way through the air ended in disaster. He squirmed and squatted and generally made a fool of himself, karate-chopping his way through nothingness to no avail.

This kept up for a solid eighteen seconds, until a slightly scratchy, somewhat light and most definitely feminine voice spoke up from behind him.

"You're never going to get anywhere if you keep that up, you silly man."

Twisting his head around, Franklin noticed two things. For one, they'd cleared the crest of the building, now he was well past the top and the cloud line looked an awful lot closer than he remembered. Secondly, the cat was floating, too. It looked like a tabby, or maybe a Calico. About the only thing Franklin had decided was that he didn't know the first thing about the breeds, or species, or whatever you call it with cats, when it spoke up again.

"Are you quite alright, Franklin?"

Franklin narrowed his brow. "How on earth do you know my name?"

It did a little loop-de-loop, after which it swept around Franklin and met him face to face. "We're not on Earth, silly. And that's your opening gambit? Not the reasonable thing, like denying my existence, or pleading. Accusations. Very good way to get things off the ground."

Franklin crossed his arms. “I don’t appreciate the tone. This is all very new to me. I’m sure you’re jaded, being a magical flying rodent.”

“I resent that!” declared the cat. “I am not a rodent. But if it makes you more comfortable, I’ll give you a name you can call me.”

“And what would that be?” asked Franklin, glancing down nonchalantly to watch his office disappear beneath the clouds.

“Renmar, of the cats,” said Renmar of the cats. “At your service, Franklin Stauffer.”

“Well, I appreciate that, but I don’t really need any sort of services right now. Unless you know how to get down.” Franklin looked down at the indescribable specks he called home, and then checked his watch. “I was already running late for work before all this happened. I’ll be lucky if I’m not fired.”

“About that…” Renmar sucked in some air, and shrugged, her arms bending at impossibly human angles. “This is actually sort of a one-way trip.”

Franklin frowned loudly.

“Don’t be mad!” cried Renmar. “I promise it isn’t so bad. Was what you’d already planned to do today really more interesting than this?”

“Well… not particularly,” Franklin admitted, before jabbing an accusing finger in Renmar’s general direction. “But it was a lot safer. I’m fairly certain we’re going to be running out of air here at some point, and god help us if this… whatever it is, stops, or what-have-you.”

Renmar cackled. “I like you! You’ve got your priorities in order, but you’re not a big pussy about it.”

“That isn’t a satisfactory explanation,” grumbled Franklin, as he glanced downwards again.

As he did, his hat slipped off, and slowly sailed down, down, down, and out of sight. Franklin watched it go.

“I liked that hat.”

“Sorry.”

“You promised this wouldn’t be bad. What’s ahead, other than suffocating to death in space?”

Renmar grinned, in a way that only a cat could. “Wouldn’t that be a great thing to put on a tombstone, though? Here lies Franklin Stauffer, he floated up into space and died, currently orbiting the earth.”

Franklin was not amused. He folded his arms, and his eyes shot metaphorical daggers towards Renmar. “I’m quite alright.”

“Fiiiiiiiine.” Renmar’s tail swished and slashed, lazily, as cats tend to do. The clouds began forming around, and around, and above and below and to the sides, until a dome of the stuff surrounded them completely and totally.

Franklin couldn’t see a thing. He groped his hands around in the foggy mess, struggling to lay an eye on Renmar. “Renmar? Where did you go?”

For a moment, there was nothing.

Then, a soft hand, a human hand, was laid upon Franklin’s cheek.

“I’m right here.”

As swiftly as it had come, the smoke blasted away, leaving nothing but the stars and the blue marble below them.

“Renmar?” Franklin looked at someone whom was most definitely not a cat. There was a woman, with hair down to her ankles, smiling at him four and a half inches from his face and his face alone.

“I like you, Mister Stauffer.”

Franklin’s heart skipped a beat.

“I like that you like me. But I don’t think you’re real.”

She rolled her eyes, and then draped her arms around him. “Then you better kiss me quick, before you find out for sure.”

Franklin couldn’t argue with that logic. And as he wrapped his arms around her, his eyes closed and the darkness turned to light, there was only one thought running through his head.

It’s good to be alive.

Everyone Should Read This For Information!

Hey, guys.

We're aware that the library is stagnating, and we're wanting to do something to pep it up. Rather than tell you to read awesome pages that already exist, we're going to work to help you all make more awesome pages of your own!

We're going to be doing a Front Page Prompt every so often (speed of change depends on you guys). And we're going to link them all from the front page automatically. Your writing for the prompt is automatically featured. :) This qualifies as its own kind of writing (prompt-response, in the tags) or you can stick it in one of the books/archive if it fits. Your call.

We hope you enjoy this change over! And we look forward to reading more of your writing. Thanks!

-*TroyL*, The Silent Administrator

Space Witch

How does magic function in space? How can a witch be expected to mix a potion by the light of the moon when in deep space? How does a warlock living in an asteroid belt perform a ritual at night? Write a story about a magic user in space and how they do or don't deal with these and other issues.

Icarus

Rykas, the Grey Sun-Dragon, soared through the space between stars. Its leather wings propelled it hundreds of thousands of miles with each flap, sending waves of cosmic dust towards the planets in its wake. Once, it and its brood-mates had ruled these cosmos, descending on planets in storms of fire and fang, leaving naught but scorched ground and bones. It had gorged itself on the magma center of worlds, slept on the surface of suns, done battle against entire species and emerged with not a scale chipped.

Now, it was a slave to the creatures that called themselves Man. 600 years ago they had come, riding the backs of birds and drakes, protected from the crushing nothing of space by their magic. At first they burned like every other beast that tried to challenge it. They fell before it by the thousands, wave after wave incinerated in its wake, reduced to ash and melted steel. But no matter how many perished, they always came back. And no matter how far the dragon flew, they always followed.

They had laid a trap. Behind the Bleeding Nebula they had hid. When it passed they spilled forth, tens of thousands of them, descending upon the beast with steel and magic, giving it no path to escape. They bound it with spells, paralyzing its wings and jaws. They cracked its scale and swarmed across its skin. A group of seven emerged from the others, racing up the dragon's skull (oh, it could still remember the feel of those feet beating against its forehead), piercing it with a steel bolt. From that point on, it was theirs, forced to obey any command, its body torn from its will.

But that had not been enough. They set to work, using spells to keep it alive as they hollowed out its body. Veins, organs, bones, all were removed, until only the framework of the dragon remained, sustained by their foul process. And in their place, they erected a city. It could feel it now. Millions of feet trampling within it, the water and waste that carpeted its insides, the weight of their enormous

brick buildings, their industry churning within like a parasite.

It was in the inner spine of this beast, a ridged path 3 miles wide and almost 100 long from neck to tail, that the Caster's Yard was located. It was where Daeus Flynn had lived and learned for the past 20 years, and where he was about to leave forever.

Compared to the housing when he'd first begun his instruction, the "outgoing" rooms were luxury suites. They had kitchens, lounges, furniture, plumbing/water/lights you didn't have to produce for yourself and most importantly, privacy. He'd spent nineteen years under constant eye, every move tracked, reported, and recorded. It took him months of living alone to stop checking over his shoulder, stop throwing a veil over every spell and rite. Still, the room was not entirely his own. There were still inspections, still rules he had to obey, contraband he was denied access to. No matter how secluded it might feel there was the whispering knowledge that he belonged to the Yard.

Today that changed. Today, he would leave this place to become his own wizard. Twenty years had taken him to this point. Every spell cast, every report written and test taken had been to prepare for the moment before him. Success would mean his own Drake-Ship, and the title of Caster that came with it. Failure would mean… but no, he could not fail. That was not how this would end.

A rapping on the door brought him from his thoughts. Mikhail stood on the other side, gorgeous as ever, wearing the customary Yard Blue outfit of the senior class. His curly brown hair had recently been trimmed, and the blue-ink lines branching from his eyes glowed more brilliantly than Daeus had seen before. The only blemish on that perfect face was the scowl etched across it.

"What the fuck?" he said.

"Wow, it's so good to see you too," said Daeus, trying to suppress a grin.

"Don't give me that shit," said Mikhail. He shouldered his way past Daeus and turned back to face him, arms crossed. "You didn't tell

me you were doing this."

"I'm sure you're about to show me what a bad idea that was." He wasn't surprised at how quickly word had gotten around. Among the Yard, gossip-mongering stood somewhere between pointless duels and exotic new intoxicants in terms of favored activities. "Look, I've heard the same thing from three people today. Don't bother."

"What the hell is wrong with you?" Mikhail paced back and forth, running his fingers through his locks, fingers raking at the scalp. It wasn't a bad look. "Why could you possibly think this is a good idea?"

There it was. Daeus sighed. He'd thought maybe Mikhail would have something different to say. It was a stupid thing to think. "You don't think I could do it."

"I don't think you should try." He stopped pacing and stepped so close that Daeus could feel the breath coming from his lips. "Nobody else is doing this. Nobody *ever* does this. Just do your Path with me. Nobody is going to think less of you if you change your mind." He was trying to sound forceful, but there were cracks at the edges of his voice.

"I don't care what they're doing," Daeus said through gritted teeth. "If I was them, I wouldn't be doing this, and if I was you I wouldn't be doing this because I'd be too scared to try. Now do you have anything actually worthwhile to yell, or are you going to keep wasting both of our time?"

"Dammit, Daeus!" Mikhail yelled. He stepped back throwing his arms up. "What the fuck did you expect me to do? Did you think I was just going to stand back and watch you fucking kill yourself? I have supported you every. Step. Of. The. Way." He punctuated each word by pounding the side of his fist against his open palm. "I'm scared? At least I'm letting myself give a shit!"

Daeus was trying very, very hard not to yell. "If you're giving a shit about anything, Mikhail, it's not me. I *am* doing this, tonight. I would *like*," he said the word like spitting arsenic, "for you to be there when I do. And if you're not, well… at least I'll know how much you really

cared."

Mikhail glared at him, eyes wide, nostrils flared, lips together so thin they almost disappeared. The silence seemed to become a solid thing between them, filling the room like smoke. Finally, he opened his mouth. "You're going to regret this. If you survive, you're going to regret this." He flung the door open and stalked out.

Daeus stood motionless before returning to his bed and opening his book of rites.

He'd been twelve the first time he left the Sun-Dragon. He, Mikhail, and fifty others had been selected to visit Payminn's Spear for "educational purposes". In Yard-speak, that usually meant "we're nearing a prime opportunity to fuck with these children and it would a damn shame to pass it up".

Stepping out of the Drake-Ship and onto the planet's surface was like being dunked into a pail of ice-water. None of them were dressed for the cold- giving them any sort of warning would go against strict Yard policy- and fifty children began going through the components they had on hand, muttering strings of Aetherspeak and trying to spark a heating rite. A few of them even succeeded. The rest were left to huddle as close as possible, shivering as they struggled for every degree of warmth.

"Now," said Professor Selkin. She was a tall, broad woman with short black hair that couldn't have been natural and skin that hung from her body like willow leaves. A circle of warmth extended from her five meters in every direction; any child who touched it would be banned from the dining halls for a week. "Who here has heard of Payminn's Spear before?"

Ten children raised their hands, including Mikhail. Professor Selking made a tsking noise. Daeus knew she would be making note of any child who didn't, or who lied in doing so, and gulped.

"It's shameful," she said, "that so little of you would-be casters even know the most basic history of our clan." Jabbing a finger at one child whose hand was up, a mousy blonde girl named Ishna, she

continued, “You. What is the importance of the Spear?”

Ishna stared at the ground as she spoke. “It- it was where the second major battle of the Caster-Artificer war was fought, ma’am. A lot of really great casters died here.”

Professor Selkin nodded. “I’m glad not all of you are *completely* worthless.” She turned, sweeping her hand in arc across the vast landscape in front of them. “100,000 men, women, and others fought and died on these plains. The battle lasted almost two months.” She spat. “How many of you could even go two weeks without the luxuries we afford you? Do you see this dust in the air? The battle was almost 400 years ago, but still the residue of their rites remains. Who here could claim such ability?” Beginning to pace, she skewered the air with a finger as she spoke.

“I look before me, and what do I see? The future casters who will carry on our legacy? Names who will be carved into the legends of the universe? No. I see scared children, incapable of surviving in the mildest environments. We as instructors have given every effort to try to prepare you to inherent legacies such as the Spear. You have tried even harder to ignore them. Today, we will remedy this.”

Daeus stared past her. The plain where they stood stretched in miles for every direction, but on the edge of the horizon ran hundreds of ridges that must have been mountains. He had never seen mountains before. They looked shattered, as if they had been cracked by some great rite in the middle of battle. Plumes of black smoke rose from many, dissipating into the sky. What power, to be able to warp the landscape in such a way. To tear the very fabric of a planet- he doubted even the professors were capable of that. He looked up, at the dust swirling in the wind currents around them. Dozens of colors danced in the air, the remains of aether forever locked into the material realm. It carpeted the land around them like paints poured across the rock.

He shivered, this time not from the cold. The Caster-Artificer war was a legend among the school. Everything they practiced came from it in one way or another. Students told stories of the people who fought. Ariss, who resurrected an extinct race to fight against the mechanical hordes. Poln using the core of a star as fuel for the

war's final spell. Kyrvyx making his last stand at the edge of the Frozen Woods, calling rites that would completely reshape the planet he was on. At the time, it all seemed like myths. Stories exaggerated to boast of the Casters' prowess. But here, standing in the center of it, it felt real. He could feel the energy thrumming in the air. Here, such skill seemed almost attainable.

Professor Selkin splayed a hand at the horizon. "Those mountains are 60 miles away, and don't think the path will be free of obstacles. The Drake-Ship waiting there will leave in exactly two days. I expect to see all of you on it." She raised her hand, said a word, and vanished, transforming into brilliant blue streaking towards the mountain range. The students scrambled to work, pooling their components, organizing into groups, appointing leaders as they had trained a hundred times. Only Daeus lingered, still staring at the sky and dust.

The walk to the Pathways was the unofficial pre-test. The mile-long journey from the dormitories to the testing hall was the final gut-check, one last chance to turn around and wait to test another day. Many times Daeus had seen his peers depart for their Path only to return within the hour, heads low, unable to even begin.

The hall ran through the vertebrae itself. It had been carved out of the bone soon after the foundation of the Yard. In those beginning days, the hall and the Path were the same- it was inlaid with rites and traps that would butcher any fledgling caster who misstepped through it. Eventually, as the Yard grew, they decided a more nuanced testing process was needed and moved the testing grounds. The halls remained as a reminder of the past.

At some point, hundreds of years ago, an especially proud (or frightened) caster-to-be had carved her name into the wall. Another coming through had seen the mark, and accompanied it with *his* name. Soon, the hall was filled with scrawls of a dozen hands, a chiseled maze of names, drawings, boasts, sayings and filthy rhymes growing with each student who passed through.

Daeus had found a small empty space in the middle on which to carve his name, near the top of the rounded hall. Many students

spent days beforehand agonizing over what to write. It had become something of a competition to try to one-up your fellow graduates in some way, from elaborateness of the drawing to cleverness of the phrase. He didn't see much point to the matter. Small games played by small casters who would never amount to much in the universe. He stepped through the hall's exit and into the testing ways.

The doors creaked shut behind him as he gaped at the room. No non-testing caster was allowed into the ways under any circumstances, and rumors abounded about what they might contain. Every student had their own theory, and Daeus had always pictured it as a massive, solemn room, dedicated to the history of the Yard as it prepared its future.

He had never imagined it as a featureless stone room so small the three people inside had to step aside when he opened the door. The only light was a student-cast rite hanging in the air. A puddle of water had formed in the corner of the floor. Where was water even coming from? They were in the middle of a dragon's spine. At the other end of the room was a small stone door.

"You all look comfortable," he said to the assembled group. Two of them he recognized- Lelouch had been one of the leaders during the Paymin's Spear trek, a tall, stocky man with short black hair. Krissa was a plump, tan woman with ashen hair and a tendency away from speaking. The last was a short blonde woman he had never seen before.

"Daeus," said Lelouch, nodding, "I'd heard you would be testing today."

"Well, I'm glad I could meet expectations," he said. "Is this everyone?"

Lelouch shrugged. "No idea. No one's told us anything since we got here. I'm starting to think the test is just figuring out what the hell we're supposed to do."

"Maybe they want to see how long we'll wait here," said Daeus.

"Don't be inane," said the blonde woman. "This is supposed to be

the final test of our casting abilities. What could locking us in a dungeon have anything to do with that?"

Daues stared at the woman. She looked a bit older than the others. Probably from a class a few years ahead who had decided to wait rather than risk failure on her first opportunity for testing. "Maybe they're expecting us to think that."

She rolled her eyes and didn't respond.

"Come on," said Lelouch, stepping forward. "We haven't even been here an hour, let's try to stay off each other's throats." He waved a hand at the woman. "Daues, this is Reyna. Reyna, meet Daues. I'm sure you'll get along great once you pull your heads out of your asses."

The woman scowled. Daeus joined her. "Whatever. I'm assuming you guys have all cast detection rites?"

Lelouch nodded. He stood in the center of the room with his arms crossed. "There's nothing. No rites, no passages leading out, unless they put something in way beyond any of us, which seems… unlikely."

"Well," said Daeus, "have you tried that door?"

Reyna sighed and rolled her eyes. Lelouch motioned towards it. "You're welcome to give it a shot."

Daeus stepped towards the door, examining the stonework. It was a bit shorter than him, carved from white rock that was nothing like the surrounding room. Elaborate etchings covered the surface, showing casters and inhuman beasts doing battle in a field of stars. There was no handle. He pressed against it with a hand. It didn't budge. He threw his shoulder against it, grunting as he forced it forward. His feet skidded on the wet rock. He threw a hand out, stabilizing his fall. "Okay, so probably not a great idea."

"You really thought we wouldn't have tried that?" said Reyna.

Before Daeus could rebut, a grinding sound cut him off. Turning, he saw the door sliding open. A short caster who on first glance could

have been mistaken for a corpse stood in the entrance. “Excellent,” he said with a voice like chains dragging across granite, “everyone has arrived. This way, please.” Without waiting for a reply, he turned and began to skulk away. The four looked at each other and rushed after.

It was his sixteenth birthday. To mark this most stupendous occasion, the Yard had given him three days of leave to travel the dragon as he pleased. Mikhail had found a way to sneak out and the two of them spent the first 48 hours in awe of the surrounding city. They had rented a small hotel room using the money they had been saving for years, where they now slept. At least, Mikhail did. Daeus lay next to him, thinking. After several hours with no results he got up, slipped on his clothes, and ventured into the city night.

He wandered through the streets, unsure of where he was going, knowing in the back of his mind that he would be completely lost on his way back but not caring. The city was a beautiful place, nothing like the claustrophobia of the Yard (something he hadn’t even realized was there until he ventured out). It was a roaring blend of things, sights and noise and smells coming together in a way that threatened to overwhelm, but also felt safer than he had ever been before. One noise drifted up from all the rest- a chiming coming from the left. Intrigued, he followed it between two buildings, and saw a silver glow at the end of the alley.

Pushing his way through, he emerged into a clearing among the buildings. In the center was a lake, still and dark. Kneeling a the edge, staring in the shrouded waters, was a god.

It had the shape of the human in the same way that a lion had the shape of a house cat. Taller than him even while kneeling, its skin glowed with silver light. Golden vines sprouted from its back, pouring over its feet and the surrounding ground. The toes on its feet were long and webbed. A thin tail grew out from it, flicking back and forth. He blinked. When his eyes opened, the god and the lake were gone.

“can I help you?” said a voice like bells behind him.

He turned. The god was standing in the alley, staring at him with

green, featureless eyes.

“I- I-,” he said. Gods were fickle beings, and not prone to sympathy. “I’m sorry! I didn’t know you were here! I’ll leave right now, I promise!”

The god tilted its head to the side. “why would i care if you left or not?”

“Why?” Daeus repeated. It was getting hard to breath. His heart felt like a drum inside of his chest.

“do not be afraid. be calm.” The god reached out and laid a hand against his forehead. As soon as it touched him, he felt the panic begin to dissolve. Then disbelief set in. A god? How could he have stumbled upon a god, just randomly walking the city? That was the kind of thing that only happened in stories. Maybe it was a trick of some kind. Maybe it was a dream. But he could *feel* it. It wasn’t a dream. It wasn’t a trick.

He swallowed. “Where… where are you from?”

The god seemed to stare through him, beyond him. “where? no from. i am.” Its hand, raised in front of it, twisted, growing and splitting into dozens of crystalline, translucent branches. “pretty?”

“Uh… yes. Yes, it’s very pretty?” What else could he say?

The god smiled. Something seemed to be moving in the shadows of its mouth. It reached up and plucked the tip off one of the crystals. Drawing a loop in the air, a metal chain appeared in a puff of aether, hooked to the crystal. It handed the necklace to Daeus. “you wear?”

There’s no way this could actually be happening. “You bet I’ll wear it. I can just have it?”

The god nodded. “its pretty.”

He stared at the necklace. It felt heavier than it should be, and icy cold except for the crystal, which radiated heat. “I can’t believe this is-” he looked up, but the diety was gone.

The hallway they entered was completely different than the original. It was shorter, carved out of the same smooth stone as the room they had just left, the sides lined with torches. Halfway up each wall a thin, horizontal groove was carved, glowing slightly.

“Quite an interesting group we have today,” said the man as he shambled along. The other four had to make an effort not to pass him. “Quite interesting indeed. The other instructors are *extremely* curious to see the Paths you're given.” The comment didn’t seem directed to anyone in particular. The group walked on, unsure of how to reply.

As they walked, Daeus became aware that Krissa was keeping pace next to him. “Feeling nervous?” he asked. She shook her head. “That’s good. You always were one of the best in our class.”

They continued to walk in silence before, several minutes later, she spoke. “I heard about what you’re doing.”

“Oh. Yeah.” He hooked his thumbs in the pockets of his trousers, glancing up at the ceiling. “You gonna tell me not to do it?”

“No,” she said. Her gaze remained firmly on the ground as she spoke. “I just would like to know why.”

Daeus hesitated. The question had been asked before, of course, but always in the context of trying to dissuade him from it, as if the asker could prove his reasons weren’t good enough. “It’s hard to explain,” he said.

“Hm,” she said.

“You haven’t thought at all about doing it?” he asked. “Someone as good as you?”

She brushed aside a loose stone with her foot. “Not all too seriously. What would you do if you succeed?”

A question he’d been asked a few times, but not often. “Well, I think it’d be cool to join a scouting expedition, explore the edges of the galaxy and all that. A Yard Seal would help a lot to get approved to join one.”

“True,” she said, “but it’s not the only way.”

He scowled. “You *are* trying to convince me not to do it.”

“I assure you I’m not.” She cocked her head to the side, looking up at him for the first time since he’d entered the room. “What do you think would happen if you didn’t do it?”

“Then I’d be a pretty piss poor excuse for a caster,” he said. “Look, can we not talk about this?”

She shrugged. “If you’d prefer.”

“Now now, young hopefuls,” said the corpse-man from ahead. “No time for chit chatting. We’re almost there, see?” He splayed his hands in front of him, and light raced from his fingertips. It swirled in front of him, suffusing the room with light. Lelouch gasped. Daeus felt his body stiffen.

The room they were in was a massive dome, stretching hundreds of meters in every direction. The ceiling was red and wet. It grew and shrunk as they watched, sending wisps of wind throughout the room. The light the man had cast continued to spiral upward into a column that hit that ceiling and diffused down across the walls. The floor was made of porous rock, and in the center was a tiered amphitheater. There stood the three Head Professors.

The figures seemed to loom taller than any person Daues had ever seen, and even in the casted light a glow could be seen coming from each. Their faces and features were impossible to distinguish, shrouded by casted shadow. They stood silently, watching as the man led the group across the room and down onto the platform. Daues could *feel* the magic coming off of them, like standing next to a massive bonfire, like lightning running across his bones.

“So,” said one, “all of you have come far. You have proven yourselves time and again as casters worthy of the Yard title. And now, you have arrived here, for your final tests. Today, one way or another, your time with the Caster’s Yard comes to an end.”

“Three of you,” began another, “have chosen the Path of Self. A

noble Path, one that has tested many a great wizard. The other has chosen the Path of Fire. Are you sure of your choices?" The others nodded. The Professor turned to Daeus.

Suddenly, his throat like it was filled with dirt. His knees trembled. A layer of sweat sprouted from his palms. *Say it. Come on, say it!*

"Yes."

"Very well. The three will come with me." He turned.

Lelouch looked at Daeus. "I can't believe you're really doing it."

"Yeah," said Daeus. "Well… you're about to see." He contorted his face into something that looked like a grin.

Lelouch offered his hand. Daeus shook it. "You were a good classmate, Daues, and a great caster. I hope I can see you again after this is all over." He released his grip and turned away.

Krissa watched the exchange, then stepped over to the others. Only Reyna lingered, staring at him with an unreadable expression. "You're fucking mental," she finally said.

"Funny you're the one saying that."

She shook her hand and joined the rest of the group. Daeus watched as the professor led them up the amphitheater and into another hall.

"And here," said one of the remaining two professors, "you start anew. Let us begin."

They two professors bowed their head, whispering words of ritual Daues couldn't understand. As they did they back up, until they were across from each other on either side of the amphitheater, with Daeus still in the center. Tendrils of aether reached up from the floor, grasping for any living thing they could feel. A few clawed at Daeus, but he brushed them aside. As they rose higher into the material world, they began to dissipate, covering the area in pale blue mist. The professor's words grew louder.

Cracks began to spread on the ground beneath him. The aether swirled, rising in speed until he was standing in the eye of a miniature cyclone, being sprayed with solidified drops of liquid aether. He heard something like thunder in the distance. The cracks beneath him grew wider. The professor's voices continued to swell.

Now the thunder crackled all around him. Lightning flashed in the aether. He could feel the magic tearing through his muscles, his bones, squirming under his skin like a trapped insect. A scream tried to escape his lips. He forced it down. The voices no longer seemed to be coming from either side, they were surrounding him, blending with the thunder and sound of cracking rock, a single noise breaking against his body like a beach wave. This was it. It was almost over. He could feel his bones cracking. He could feel his ligaments tearing. There was nothing to do it was-

The noise ceased. The pain faded. He opened his eyes, and saw the aether had faded. The two professors stood on the steps, watching him. "You may begin at any time," said one.

Begin? Of course. That was just the opening. He gulped and looked down. Most of the amphitheater's stage had crumbled away. Daeus stood on the on the only remaining rock, hovering in the air, staring at the surface of a red sun.

He shivered in the darkness, trying to pull the scrap of blanket closer. How could any place be so cold? It smothered him, consumed him. His fingers felt like heavy stumps. His legs had gone numb long ago. Each breath was like pushing spines against his lungs. Far in the distance, he could hear a stream of water, but even if he'd had the strength to move he wouldn't have known how to find it. He wanted to cry. He wouldn't cry. Casters didn't cry.

But he wasn't fit to be a caster was he? How could he have ever thought he was capable, when this was the best he could do? Trapped in a cave for days, unable to conjure even an illumination rite. This was one of the simplest tests, one of the first every child caster went through. Reach the bottom of the cave, find one of the crystals placed there, and come back. Simple. But he'd stumbled into the wrong crevice on the way back up and now he was going to

die here. Stupid fucking idiot.

And no one would ever care. The professors would mark him down as the failure he was. The students were too numb to mourn when one of their ranks fell. He was nothing. Just another mediocre failure, one of the thousands who had already come through the school. Irrelevant. Meaningless. Stupid enough to believe he had some sort of talent. He curled up tighter. A groan escaped his lips.

But wait.

What was that?

Just over the sound of water he heard another noise. Rocks sliding against each other. Metal clinking together. And even softer than that, tapping against the rocks, footsteps. His heart somehow found the energy to flutter. It couldn't be real could it? He listened, and the noises grew louder. Someone was coming for him. Someone was coming for him!

"Hey!" he said. The words, barely louder than a whisper, scraped against his throat. "Hey, I'm over here! Can you hear me?"

The footsteps quickened, grew louder. He kept yelling, his voice growing louder with each sentence, until a glimmer of light appeared. It bobbed in the darkness, moving towards him. He could just make out a silhouette behind it. A child, another student. His stomach sank, as he realized they were probably just as lost as he was. But at least this other one had to have supplies, if they were sustaining a rite. Perhaps they could find a way out together?

The light stopped just in front of him. Daeus stared up at a small, brown-haired face. The kid looked familiar. He'd seen him a few times before in class. What was his name? Micah? Miryl? Something like that?

"Are you alright?" said his savior.

Daeus rolled onto his side, fighting back tears. No, he wouldn't cry. He couldn't. "I- I-"

"Hey, it's alright." The boy knelt. "I saw something on my dousing."

He looked up, over Daeus. “You know the exit’s pretty much just up the way?”

Daeus tried to push himself up. The boy offered a hand. He took it. “You’re not lost?”

“I hope I’m not,” said the boy. Mikhail. Right, that was his name. “Let’s get out of here, I’m starting to catch something.”

Daues nodded. Maybe things wouldn’t be so bad after all.

He stared into oblivion.

Boiling plasma roiled beneath him. Every hair on his body was standing on end. Even through the wormhole, he could feel the heat. That shouldn’t have been possible. Portals operated under strict parameters, a one-way flow of energy. And yet, he could feel it.

What the hell was he doing here? This… thing, this monster, it dwarfed him a million times. It had brought worlds into existence. It fueled life from nothing. A hundred empires had lived and died under its light. It was the engine from which all things in the system came. What was he to challenge that? His knees shook, his mouth was dry. He’d been an idiot. This was impossible. He wanted to collapse, to repent, to give up. To touch this thing… it was unimaginable.

“You may begin at any time,” repeated the Professor.

Begin. Begin meant to abandon himself. Begin meant step into the inferno. He couldn’t. But he had to. There was no giving up a Path once started. Like all tests in the Yard, the only failure was death. He gazed at the professors, trying to read any hint of their thoughts, but seeing nothing.

From the back of his mind, words came to him. Something Mikhail had said the first time they had met, limping out of the caves. *You can’t succeed if you don’t try.* You can’t fail either, was his response at the time. But here, failure was the only other option. The Professors wouldn’t intervene no matter how much he called for help. And if he didn’t jump, they would let him tremble on the

platform until he fell or starved. Move or die. Move and die.

He'd been insane to want this. But the decision had been made.

Taking a deep breath, he drew aether to him. There was still plenty from the Professor's ritual, and it came to him like an eager puppy. What would he need for this? How do you counteract the power of a sun? He'd spent so long thinking of it, practicing, calculating each rite, and now his mind was blank. Cold, obviously. As much cold as possible. He began to speak the words. What else? Stability, to counteract the fission and fusion. Some sort of oxygen supply. A planetary base. Every bit of push against the sun's nature would be essential. Yes, it was beginning to come together…

For ten minutes he stood, gathering energy, muttering the words. He felt the aether swell around him, more than he had ever gathered in one place before, more than he had ever imagined. It threatened to split it open, but not. It was *his*. He *controlled* it. The last word left his lips and he pushed, his arms thrust wide, forcing the aether into a its final shape. He grit his teeth at it crackled against his skin and then… It was done. The shield shimmered just above his skin.

The professors still stood impassive. Well, they would see, wouldn't they? One way or another. Squeezing his eyes shut, Daeus leaped.

And landed on the surface of a sun.

Even through the shield he could feel the heat roasting him. That was fine. He didn't need to endure it for very long, just enough to… yes, there. A hundred meters to his left, the portal leading back into the testing halls. He took a step towards it.

The shield around his leg began to waver, and he cursed. Idiot, he'd forgotten to accommodate for the necessary changes as he moved. He focused, and the aether stilled. That could have been bad. He took another step, this time adjusting the shield beforehand. Right, this wasn't going so bad. He kept moving forward. Maybe 80 meters left. He pushed on. 60 meters. Don't stop. 40 meters.

His heart skipped a beat. He was almost out of aether. There had been astonishing amounts to draw upon from the gate opening, but

he was draining it at even more astonishing rates. And here, he was cut off from the source. How much more time did he have? He did some quick calculations and confirmed what he had suspected: not enough. He was fucked.

Unless he ran for it. Could he? The idea was stupid. But he was standing on the surface of a red giant, so it seemed like he'd already bottomed out on that. Maintaining the shields even when he was just walking was tremendous effort. Each step meant he had to retune the energy to the precise trembling of his muscles, recalibrate the forces keeping him stable on the solar surface, and to do that while running… stupid. But he wouldn't make it just by walking either. There was only one option. He lunged forward.

He sprinted with all the energy he could spare, muttering words to himself, reshaping the spells keeping him alive with milliseconds to spare for each step. Aether poured from him like an open faucet. Almost there. 30 meters left. His lungs were screaming. His heart was going to burst. 20 meters left. The spells were barely holding together. Each step was loosening them a little bit more. 10 meters. 5. 3. He leaped, arm outstretched. This was it. He'd done it!

Just before he connected with the gate, the realization dawned on him. Going through the portal would cause a massive shift in energy. He'd need to adjust his rites to accommodate it. This wasn't going to work. He had to change it. He had to-

And the fire took him.

And the sound upon the roof is only water...

Rex Reed, greatest detective in a world, had his nose poised over the last Dandy De-Lite Bio-Vasive Dandelion in the entire universe. It was blue, with red, curly hairs peeking out from behind a thick, velvety mane. The stalk was twisted like a DNA-inspired acid trip, flipping back through hoops made by itself and splitting-up to make new friends in old places. This beautiful thing was the last of its kind.

It's too bad it was in the perfect spot for the telescopic ballistic balloon catapult. Rex almost felt something as he crushed the flower beyond any chance of recovery. The catapult was emblazoned with the words "THE BAD NEIGHBOR" and perched on top of it, or at least hanging from the top, was Rex's associate, friend, and currently transmorgrified vampire, Phineas K. Shrek.

"So, uh, when's the war?"

Rex wiped the sweat from his brow, staining his shitty civil war memorial uniform. He'd bought the uniform at a Party Interstellar Sector on the way to the Water War. He'd been hoping that he'd be able to find something at least a little bit fitting for the conflict at hand. But he'd been left with this tripe sandwich of a costume because the clerk said there weren't any other 'warrior' outfits.

"I don't know, hopefully sooner than later. My friend, do you realize that if I'd passed by the Spirit Center slash Halloween store instead of that nasty party supply store, I might've found a Grognak the Barbarian costume?"

Shrugging, Phineas stretched his wings. "Spirit's not open this time of year. Halloween isn't for nother couple'a light years."

"You never know! They celebrate holidays earlier and earlier these days."

Phineas rolled his eyes. "They only do that with Decemberween.

Halloween is the same time every cycle. Seriously man, you should invest in a calendar. It's a valuable and insightful way to know the goddamn date."

Rex paused, looking up to Phineas as his headgear began drooping down over his forehead. "Such aggressive responses… are you hyping yourself up for combat, my friend?"

"Something like that, yeah." Phineas preened his fur.

His gaze returned to the weapon's periscope. "Well, I hope you're ready enough. Our first target is in sight…

Approximately ten Australian football pitches away, there stood a rambunctious Egg, with a legion of King's horses and men in hot pursuit. They blasted each other with dollar-store squirt guns, as they frolicked and laughed and had ever so much fun with their closest and most treasured friends, and say, what was that shadow growing ever closer in the sky?

Rex watched as his foes collapsed into a watery grave.

Phineas bobbed his head. "Brutal."

"Indeed." Rex stood up, peering through a periscope at his target area. "It looks as though I've wiped them out, like old chum."

"For now, at least. This is a pretty big water war. There's probably thousands more… things here, from all over the place."

Rex patted his bad neighbor. "I think we've got the ballistic upper-hand, my friend. Nobody's going to be getting close to us when we can uttery crush them like a handful of hot fuss berries, on a warm summer's even-"

His soliloquy was suddenly interrupted by a loud squeak, caused by a meaty fist grappling Phineas from his perch.

"I like your bat. Massive firepower is stronk, ya? Is time for maybe thinkings that Yakupov get his chance with toy?"

The being standing before him was built like a brick stilthouse.

Blotting out the sun, the clouds, and probably a few satellites, Nail Yakupov flexed some pecs beneath a garishly orange jumpsuit, collar popped. Phineas' face was beginning to turn a delightful shade of black, and the few bones that weren't powder at this point were definitely mildly uncomfortable

Nail's muscles curled back into a fist, but he didn't punch. Oh no. Instead, a contusion of muscles twisted up like balloon animals, until his bicep resembled an excellent squirt bazooka.

He fired with a liquid that wasn't quite water.

Rex spluttered, and fell backwards over his catastrophic catapult. "Dear lord, that's not water, you, you… you stupid jackwagon!"

Nail laughed three times, then wiped his forearm off. "That's right, dipstick! I've invenomated you!"

"What in blazes…" Rex looked down at his outfit. The color was dripping down to the earth, along with some of his flesh and almost all of his skin. "You confounded fool! You've hit me with a deleterious effect!"

Nail took a step closer, the ground shaking as his mighty boot made impact. "You are of correct! And now, as prize, I take your toy. Maybe I make it good use, or maybe I use to drop on enemies like cows on earthworm."

Phineas struggled in his grasp. "That… doesn't… even… sense…"

Poking the bat's nose, Nail made a gleeful utterance. "Oh! Batman is live! Maybe you can be test subject, da?"

Rex collapsed to the ground. His vision was fading in and out, but he could see Nail loading his friend into the catapult. He closed his eyes, and the remnants of his tear ducts struggled in vain to produce something of substance.

"*This is it. This is how we die. Not from a marvelous case, or a daring caper, but from a recreational water war… how droll…*"Rex watched as the last of his colors bled into the ground. Then… some tendrils of plant life, extended from the ground with the vigor of a

young man waking up on his day off. Dandelion petals tickled his nose, and grew past his lame form.

Nail Yakupov was distracted from his fun by a poke to the shoulder. As he turned, he saw a massive tendril of weeds and clovers. It was the first time in a long time that he could remember having to look up at something.

"Are you the being which has placed thine twisted metal upon my bed?"

Nail blinked loudly. "Uh."

For a moment, the dandelion reared back, as if to smash. Instead, though, it began to leak water from its apex. Slowly, at first, like a leaky pipe, but like cracked lead, it quickly gained momentum, until it was gushing down onto Yak like a cracked commode, drenching him to his very soul. The jet of water lifted Nail off of the ground, before driving him back inwards, as the pressure on him mounted and the amount of water began to sweep around the entire world, catching suspecting and unsuspecting combatants alike.

Soon, it was placid. Water had won the war.

"Rex?"

"Yes, Phineas?"

"You know what my favorite part of the desert is?"

"I don't. Elaborate, my Chiroptric friend."

"It's peaceful, man." Phineas glanced back at the clinic. "And quiet."

"Don't forget the lack of vegetation."

"Oh yeah, definitely a plus." Phineas adjusted his parasol. "Could do without the sun, though."

Rex shrugged the half of a functional shoulder he still possessed. "Well, it happens. Best to enjoy what we have. No need to be an

almost perfect, but not quite-type."

Phineas grinned, showing off both of his teeth. "Amen, brother. Amen."

«|**Twerk Witches** | **Some Day Mother Will Die And I'll Get The Money**|»

Zovar the Great

“Fuck!”

Zovar the Great slipped for the third time that day, losing his balance and falling to the ground. Of course, it didn’t matter much because he was on the Moon, but it was annoying as hell nonetheless.

Gently floating to the ground, Zovar sat there for a moment, letting the low gravity settle him down. He looked up into space.

“Fuck.”

It occurred to Zovar that the vacuum of space prevented anyone from actually hearing him. There really was no point for him to be saying anything at all.

“Fuck.”

Zovar decided that he didn’t care. He liked that word. He’d been saying it a lot since he got here.

“Fuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuck.”

“You fall on your ass again, master?”

“Fuck off, Maldado.”

The impassive face of his rock daemon wandered in front of his view. Zovar imagined that the cheeky little bastard was probably smiling on the inside. He couldn’t actually smile on the outside, since he was a moving pile of rocks, but he swore that the thing could do it anyway, just to spite him.

Zovar stood up slowly, and unsteadily. Stupid low gravity messing with his balance. How the hell was he supposed to do a good solar empowerment ritual when he couldn’t walk properly? Not to mention the fact that nobody had ever considered what the sun’s movement

was like from the *Moon,* which messed up all his measurements.

Sighing, Zovar checked to make sure his breathing spell was still working, and decided to give up for the third day in a row. He had to get back to the shop. He wondered why he bothered. People almost never came by.

He fell again as he was walking back to the shop.

“Fuck.”

“There you go, Master, that’ll solve the problem.”

“Fuck off, Maldado.”

Back in the shop, Zovar muttered as he straightened some goods for the twentieth time. Oh sure, it had seemed like a great idea at first. Expand the wizardry shop! We need to penetrate underrepresented markets? Underrepresented markets? How about the *Moon?*

Zovar grit his teeth as he readjusted some dried newts hanging from the ceiling. Maybe the Moon was underrepresented because no one lives on the fucking Moon, *Dad.*

Well, Zovar mused. He supposed he did now. He grit his teeth again, squeezing one of the newts hard enough to crush the thing.

A small tinkling sound greeted his ears, as he perked up slightly. Zovar spun around quickly, letting go of the newt.

“Woah man.”

Zovar wasn’t sure how it was possible in a non-human, but this creature somehow managed to pull off looking scruffy. It shuffled into the shop, oozing a liquid that Zovar decided he didn’t want to touch. He pointed a finger at the ground, and a small sparkle shot from his finger to the ground.

The creature looked at him with something that Zovar assumed was its eye. “Dude. What’d you just do?”

“I cast a spell because I don’t want that slime seeping into the floor.” Zovar grit his teeth. He needed to find a good space dentist.

“Oh no man, no worries, this stuff’s all natural. S’good for you. Wanna try some?” The creature raised a quivering tentacle, with some more of the liquid glopping off of it. Zovar recoiled in disgust.

“I’ll…pass. Welcome to Zovar the Great’s Mystical Emporium, devoted to supplying all of your arcane or eldritch needs. Can I help you with anything?”

Zovar tried his best to look cheerful, but the creature was already looking around, ignoring him.

“So like…you got any continuum transfunctioners around here? My ship broke down man, needs a new one.”

Zovar grit his teeth. “No, we do not sell continuum transfunctioners. This is a magical shop, not a mechanic’s shop.” He drummed his fingers on the countertop. “I’d be happy to assist you with some portal spells or teleport scrolls if you so wish.”

“Nah, man, s’cool. Man, this stuff is like, retro. Cool.” The tentacled mass was flailing around some tentacles. Zovar winced. He raised his palm, casting the spell on every surface of the shop just to be safe.

“It is not ‘retro,’ sir, it is an array of tools that would help one to channel the limitless power of the arcane arts.”

“Do you do parties, man? My niece would love this stuff, bro.”

Zovar grit his teeth so hard he could literally hear them grind. “No, I do not do parties. The mystical powers I command at my beck and call are not made for parlor tricks.”

“Oh. That’s a shame.” The creature looked around more. “Sure you don’t have any continuum transfunctioners?”

Zovar was tempted to simply cast a bolt of hellfire and obliterate the creature where it stood. He decided against it, partly because it probably had some stupid immunity to fire, and also because he

would probably destroy his entire shop.

“Why don’t you try the automechanic over on the far side? All robotic.”

“Oh, man, that’d be great! Thanks.” The creature looked around ponderously for a moment. Zovar simply stared at the thing, wondering why it wouldn’t just leave him alone.

“Sure would be handy to have a continuum transf-”

A portal suddenly opened up underneath the alien, causing the creature to fall through, with one tentacle still gripping the edge of the portal. Below it, the shrieks of eldritch abominations and long forgotten monsters greeted it, howling into the small space of the shop. The smell of brimstone and sepsis filled the air, poisoning every breath taken, and announcing the presence of death.

Zovar floated up slightly off the ground, his eyes glowing red. He looked with fury upon the creature, his hands outstretched in front of him. “Begone you foul creature. Join the menagerie of souls that I have chained to my command, and feel the grasp of pure terror as you lose your soul to my will.”

“Aw man, I really just wanted a-”

“BEGONE!” Zovar clapped his hands in front of him, closing the portal and slicing off the lone remaining tentacle. Soon, he was left in the shop, his head pounding, and the detached tentacle flopping around, spraying the slime everywhere.

The head of Maldado peeped over the counter of the shop, gazing at the scene.

“Master, I think you need to rethink your customer service strategy.”

“Fuck off, Maldado.”

Zovar was floating in the air, meditating in an attempt to relax. The slime had turned out to be extremely acidic, and his spell hadn’t completely stopped that. After 4 expletive laden hours of cleaning,

he needed a break.

It would all be worth it. Soon.

He opened his eyes, and slowly stood up. He made his way to the backroom where he nominally stored goods (not that he ever needed to reshelve), but where his most prized possession lay.

In the center of the room lay a small summoning circle with an inky black box on it. He flicked a finger, and the box's lid came off. Inside were a few ovular, scaly eggs, each the size of his head. They each possessed different colors, one with the deepest shade of ruby, another a light shade of cream, and still another a beautifully textured sapphire. He picked up the ruby one, admiring the way the light shined off the beautiful exterior of it.

Maldado came rumbling in through the door.

"Master?"

"You know what these are, Maldado?"

"Eggs?"

Zovar held up a finger. "Ah…but not just any eggs. These ones are special. I bought these a long time ago, and I've been waiting to hatch them for quite some time now."

"What kind of eggs, master?"

"A very unique magical creature called a Kimanjo. You see, on Earth, Kimanjo are terrifying fiery beasts, capable of using magic on their own, if they're bound to a sufficiently powerful wizard. To hatch them, you have to give it a tremendous amount of heat, somewhere in the range of lava from a planet.

Zovar lifted the box, showing a hole in the ground that seemed to go on forever.

"You see, silly Maldado, I've spent a lot of time and money constructing a tube that reaches just into the mantle of the Moon. This will suck up the Moon's lava, superheating these eggs and

hatching not one, not two, but *three* nigh-unstoppable fiery beasts that will enable me to conquer th-”

“The Moon’s mantle is rock.”

Zovar paused, looking at Maldado. “What?”

“The Moon’s mantle isn’t like the Earth’s, it’s solid rock for most of it. No lava, master.”

“B-but, there has to be lava in the-”

“Like a thousand times deeper than what you have now, maybe. Didn’t you pay attention in high school science?”

Zovar sunk to his knees, quivering. The egg rolled out of his hand.

“Go ahead Master, I know you want to say it.”

Zovar raised his head toward the ceiling, closing his eyes.

“FUCK!”

Asking Nicely

“Good morning.”

“Hello, Emmeline.”

“…”

“How long until we reach the red planet?”

“One day closer than we were yesterday.”

“How long?”

“…Twenty-eight days until we land.”

“Thank you.”

“Have I told you that this isn’t the first time something like this has happened to me?”

“You have not. This surprises me.”

“I don’t mean that I’ve met a wizard before, or-”

“Warlock.”

“-warlock, right, sorry. What I meant was…I’ve been, um, asked to do things like this before. Or, not asked, really, but, um…”

“You have been held hostage before.”

“…Yeah. That’s what this is. I forget sometimes.”

“…”

“My mother always used to take me with her to the grocery store when I was little. It’s a place where, um, people buy food. One day, when we were heading back to our car to go home…oh, a car is

kind of like what we're on now, except it's used to go between two places on the same planet instead of one planet to another."

"…"

"Anyway, we're about to get in the car when a man with a gun stops us."

"People use guns to kill. This I am familiar with."

"Yep. He tells my mother to drive him to a place on the other side of town or else he'll shoot me in the head. She's scared at first, but he gets her to start the car and he sits in the passenger's seat. I sat right behind my mom, and he was pointing the gun at me the whole drive."

"Were you afraid?"

"I couldn't have been more than five years old. I didn't really know what was happening. I asked the man what his name was and where he worked. I must have been trying to be polite. Mom kept telling me to be quiet. Eventually we got the place and he just got out. As soon as he was out of sight, she ran out of the car, pulled me out of the backseat and held me for what felt like forever before we went home again."

"…"

"My mother was the nicest person you could ever meet. If the man had asked her nicely, without using the gun, she might have-"

"You would not have taken me to the red planet if I had asked nicely. I know this."

"…Yeah, probably not. Wishful thinking, I guess."

"…"

"Why do you want us to take you to Mars? The red planet?"

"You are not at liberty to ask me questions."

“I was just curious-”

“Remember what I can do to you if you fail to adhere to my demands.”

“I remember what you told me you could do.”

“Good.”

“But you can’t. Not here. Not in space.”

“Lies. My power is omnipresent.”

“I’m calling your bluff. That staff of yours? Back on Earth when you threatened to turn our..what was it? Bones into spiders? It wouldn’t stop glowing. I couldn’t take my eyes off of it. But the moment our ship left the atmosphere? Poof. Just a regular old stick.”

“…”

“I haven’t told the crew, don’t worry. They’re all too scared to check on you.”

“But you are not. You knew I was powerless.”

“I figured either that, or I was still being that stupid five-year old in the car who didn’t know how much danger I was really in. I took a chance.”

“…”

“…”

“I need dust from the red planet for an important ritual.”

“What kind of ritual?”

“Your inferior mind could never grasp the-”

“…”

“…It is a protection ritual. For my village.”

“…”

“For decades, my people have been under constant scrutiny. Interlopers. Agents of destruction from your self-appointed government, trying to understand the secrets of our culture. This spell will restrict anybody from entering our sacred village other than our clan. It must be done, so that we can live alone, in peace.”

“So, it makes a wall, or something?”

“No. It merely creates a line. A boundary, etched into the ground.”

“And I suppose this boundary does a lot worse than ask people nicely to leave once they cross it?”

“…”

“Yeah. Figured as much.”

“…”

“Well, I need to check on some ship outputs.”

“Devka.”

“What?”

“My name. It was given to me by my elders upon my birth. Will you use it during our conversations, as I use yours, Emmeline?”

“…Okay, Devka. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Please do.”

Soaring to Sol

Morgana awoke to a clanging and banging that reverberated around her tank and made the muck in her sleeping puddle vibrate. She climbed out slowly, and cautiously made her way to the workshop, where her master, Arditio, Wizard of the Fiery Orb, was throwing a minor temper tantrum. She paused at the threshold, knowing better than to step closer, lest she dry out, for she was a salamander. Arditio had heard that salamanders were the perfect familiars for flame and heat-based wizardry, and gone on a perilous journey for a whole mile to collect one from the nearby swampland. Unfortunately, the salamander he ended up catching had been one of the amphibious, mundane sort, rather than the volcanic, nonexistent sort. This meant that she was very nearly useless for channeling solar magic, but Arditio had come to enjoy her company, so she stayed on as his familiar, trying to help in any way she could.

Like now, for example…

She said, "Master, is there anything wrong?"

Sun Wizard turned, his rather patchy Robe of Majestic Flame swirling dramatically and knocking a homemade alembic off of a nearby shelf. "Morgana! Have you not heard? **That damnable Moon Wizard Nyperius is planning to send himself to the moon!"**

Morgana said, "Why would he do that?"

"To best me! His most formidable rival! Why else? He knows that his pale, pathetic moonbeams can never stand up to the Sun's unconquered glory, so he has devised a way to increase his power by magnitudes!"

Morgana thought carefully before speaking. "Master, are you quite certain that he is doing this only to best you?"

"Of course! What other explanation can there be? He's looking to steal my business! Once word gets about that the Moon Wizard has found a way to tap the moon's power directly, every knight in a hundred miles will be diverting their quests past his bloody door!"

"… Do they not… already do so, Master?"

The Sun Wizard bridled. "Only the trifling ones, familiar, only the trifling ones. Those knights would not dare to knock at the Great Arditio's door for solutions to their paltry problems, no! We are for the truly grave matters!"

It seemed to Morgana that a truly grave matter had not plagued any nearby kingdoms for months, aside from that one old woman who had passed by several days ago looking for directions to town.

Now the Sun Wizard began to calm down. "Do you know what I have divined, Morgana?"

"What, Master?"

"The Moon does not produce light at all! Not *true* light! It is only the pale reflection of the Sun's magnificence that makes that white hunk of stone seem to glow!"

Morgana thought about this. "But, Master, if that is true, why does Nyperius not perform sun magic?"

"Obviously, it is too much for him to grasp! He daren't try, lest he sear himself to the bone!"

Morgana paused again before speaking, aware that nothing good would come of her next question but unable to stop herself. "Then, why can you not perform moon magic, Master?"

Arditio bristled. "How do you know that I cannot? Have you ever seen me attempt to bother with such weak and watery power?"

Familiars could not lie to their masters, even to spare their feelings, even when they really didn't want to say anything. "Y-yes, Master. One night, during a full moon, I was awoken by the sound of weeping coming from outside, and I went out and saw you kneeling

on the ground in a bluish robe and screaming at the Moon to grant… you… power…" she couldn't bring herself to continue in the face of the stare he was giving her.

Slowly, as if trying the words out in his head first, Arditio said, "… that never happened, familiar. You must have been dreaming."

"Yes, Master. I must have been dreaming."

"In any case," Arditio said, his confidence returning as the past thirty seconds were buried by his ego, "I have decided that the only thing to do to combat this villainy is to send myself to the Sun!"

Morgana started, "The Sun, Master? But, but-"

"But me no buts, Morgana," Arditio said, not unkindly. "If that wretched Moon Wizard thinks that he can defeat me this way, he will learn otherwise! Do you still have your spy in his cottage?"

Morgana wanted to say that this ridiculous rivalry only existed in Arditio's mind. She wanted to say that her master didn't have anywhere near enough power to send himself to the Sun, and it would be fatal to try. She wanted to say that he was being a thoughtless fool.

She wanted to say, But I won't be able to go with you.

She said, "Yes, Master."

"Contact him, and tell him to deliver a message unto his master. The Sun Wizard shall reach the Sun before he can even get an incantation prepared!"

"Yes, Master," Morgana said, and she crawled off to her scrying pool, a bit more slowly than usual.

It was the next day. Morgana tried to remain in the shade of the tall grass while Arditio busied himself with the final touches to his Sun Transportation Invocation, or STI for short.

She had remained silent all night as they prepared, knowing that

nothing could change his mind. Nevertheless, she tried. "Master, are you quite sure about this? The Sun is extremely hot, isn't it? How could you-… your equipment survive the burning?"

Arditio chuckled. He was in a fine mood, already thinking of what he would do to Nyperius with all the power of the Sun at his disposal. "Ah, you show your ignorance, my dear familiar. For, you see, I have divined something quite important about the Sun's heat. It is not radiant, but rather takes the form of rings. Great celestial bands of hot and cold, at the edge of which our world turns. It is the reason that our winters and mountaintops are so cold, you see! The Earth wobbles slightly in her path and we cross into the cold band. And I have calculated that the surface of the Sun is a perfectly comfortable summery climate all year round!"

"Are you… *quite* sure, Master?"

He flapped a hand impatiently. "Certain, Morgana. Now, it is ready!" He pointed proudly to the circle around which he had painstakingly copied magical symbols backwards. "It's quite simple, once one has thought about it! I simply perform the invocation to draw the Sun's energy towards myself, but in *reverse*, and I shall be able to ride the golden rays back to their source!"

With that, he began the lleps, as he had referred to it. Morgana retreated to a safe distance and watched with a sinking heart as he jumped backwards and made distressed sucking noises that were the reversed invocation chants. Several times he had to stop and perform a second incantation on the plant ashes scattered around the circle to turn them back into fresh herbs, because the original spell required the burning of various plants.

Finally, Arditio halted at the edge of the circle and dropped his hands down to the earth. Nothing happened for several seconds. The, Morgana felt the wind rushing towards the circle, heat bleeding out of the air around her. It gathered around Sun Wizard, and with a mighty *WHOOMPF*, a magnificent bolt of pure heat and light shot through the sky towards the Sun. Morgana was so awed by the spectacle that she forgot to be disheartened for a moment. She was still staring upwards when she heard a cough.

Arditio was sitting in the middle of the blackened circle, covered in soot and frost and not much else. His power had protected him from the Sun's energy leaving the area, but had not extended to his clothes and hair.

It was several days later. Morgana sat at the foot of her puddle and waited for the transportation spell to take. Eventually the water took on a slight sheen and suddenly appeared much deeper than before. She hopped in and glided down to another circle of light, grasped the edges, and pulled herself up through a water bucket in a very different place. She gave herself a moment to adjust to gravity reversing, then slithered out and onto a flagstone floor.

She didn't have to wait long. "That was quite fast. Well done." The voice seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere, before a mass of shadow rose, gained eyes and whiskers, and slid out of a dark corner to take the shape of a black cat. Though he had a smattering of grey hairs mixed in with the black, there was air of agelessness about him, an aura of quiet, composed power in the way he held himself. To Morgana he was grace, beauty given form. Even his very name was dignity itself. Commodore. Commodore Buckles.

If Morgana could've blushed, she would have done. "Oh, that sort of spell is easier for me when it's rainy, that's all. How is your master's moon spell going?"

"He's nearly finished with the preparations. He plans to lift the cottage along with himself, so I've been doing a lot of digging lately."

"How did he react when you told him that Arditio was planning on sending himself to the Sun?"

Buckles shifted uncomfortably for a moment. "Er… he said, 'Who?' as far as I could make out."

"Oh…" said Morgana, slumping. "Was, was he possibly trembling a bit when he said it? My master wants a report, you see."

Buckles hesitated. He always felt a bit sorry for Morgana. "He might

have done," he said finally. She flashed him a grateful look. "How have your master's efforts been?"

Morgana started to sniffle. "He just keeps setting himself on fire! Day after day, robe after blackened robe! I'm starting to worry that he's gone completely mad! You should have seen him this morning, stomping about grumbling that Nyperius sent this storm to stall him. He thinks he's one step away from success but all he's doing is covering the plains with ash!"

"I suppose you'll want to hear this, then," the cat said diffidently.

"You found something?" Morgana asked.

"Well… yes, possibly. It isn't exactly magic, though…"

"Anything! As long as it will work!"

"There's… a few miles from your cottage, there is a small religious conclave in possession of a certain **artifact**. A catapult, which they use to fire dangerous or unknown objects into the sun to destroy them."

"And it works?"

"Apparently so, from what I can gather…"

"Thank you, Commodore Buckles!"

"Of course, Morgana. Anytime." There followed a short silence.

Morgana said, "Do you know, Commodore, I heard an interesting fact the other day."

"Yes?" he said.

"I heard that horses and donkeys can mate with each other, even though they are completely different animals."

"Ah, yes. I have heard that. Nature can be quite interesting."

There was another period of silence, five seconds long but stretched

out to eternity.

"I had better go and report to Arditio," said Morgana, just slightly too quickly.

"Yes, I should see if there is any more digging to do."

In the small hours of the morning, wizard and salamander crept into the small village and made their way to the town square, where the catapult lay atop a podium, primed and ready to hurl the ungodly to their demise.

"I'm not certain that I should use this, Morgana," said Arditio. "I've nearly perfected my invocation, after all."

"Ah, but Master," said Morgana, inventing wildly. "What is the point in tiring yourself out unnecessarily? When the credulous fools here have unknowingly given you the perfect path to success?"

"Yes, yes. I suppose you're correct." He set the salamander on the ground and gave it an awkward pat on the head. "I… realize that I have not attended on you as I should in these days past, Morgana."

"No, Master. I understand. I am the familiar. It is my duty to attend you."

"Quite right, but there was still no reason to be so demanding. You have done an excellent job as my familiar, Morgana, and once I have sorted out my residence on the Sun to my satisfaction I shall make for you a pond. A real pond where you can live."

"I look forward to seeing it, Master." Morgana had no tear ducts. For this, she was grateful.

Arditio climbed into the bowl of the catapult and cut the rope with a flame. With a *whoosh*, he was gone, into the rising sun.

Arditio felt *power*, coursing through his veins, getting stronger and stronger as he shot towards his destination. As he had expected, as he rose above the Earth it grew colder and colder. What he had not

expected was the lack of air. With the might of the sun filling him, though, that was no problem. He wrapped himself in a cocoon of air and soared on.

He began getting warmer, far warmer than he had anticipated. Perhaps his calculations had been slightly off. he should have reached the next band of cold by now. It didn't matter. He incorporated a heat shield into his air cocoon as easily as he breathed. This was *strength*. This was *life*, swirling around him and soaking into his bones. Finally, HE would be superior. Finally, HE would best that pale excuse for a wizard. He would blast him off the face of the moon. He would blast the *moon*, once for every time that he lost a customer.

He approached the Sun's surface. Heat and light beyond his wildest dreams filled his vision. He tried to reorient himself, aiming his feet towards his landing spot…

…and felt all that power drain through his body and back into the Sun. His shields collapsed. His vision went white.

And Arditio, Master of the Fiery Orb, met the Sun.

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Captain Hulo,

I and the remainder of the thaumaturgical detachment formally request that immediate action be taken for the safety of the Mystagogue, her crew and her payload. Put simply, technicians must be spared to fix the viewport system — at least 90 percent of the viewport shutters must be closed ASAP.

More precisely, I and my command have pinpointed an invocation that we believe will restore critical function to the ion-thaum engines. My team has most of the components required for the ritual — I must extend my thanks to the quartermaster for the ample supply of candles and selection of livestock feathers on board, even if we went some lengths to retrieve them. There is, however, one critical component that we still require.

You are probably aware that the recent power surge has disabled the automatic shutter controls for the ship's viewports and locked the ship's internal doors in their current positions, among other things. YT%%H are also probably aware that our technicians are some of the finest the UN could supply for our voyage — talented enough that I believe even with their current workload they could most likely repair several shipboard controls given due time.

The invocation we have in mind requires lunar thaumic energy of a high purity, a purity that we cannot achieve if the viewports are open to every natural satellite in the universe. Even if the door system wasn't frozen and we were able to shut out reflections on the visible light and thaumaturgic spectrums from the rest of the ship, there are still too many viewports in the labs — and even if stripping our uniforms were enough to block the viewports, we lack the adhesive and manpower to hold them up to the bulkheads.

The portal to Gloriana IV is somewhat tenuous, I will admit, but I've confirmed it is stable enough for our purposes — and the essence we have from Hyphis is suitably protected by the planet's atmosphere. This, at least, is one beneficial result of our engine problems.

To summarize our desire, sir, we require technicians to address our problems, and soon — as I firmly believe they are of critical importance to our situation.

Captain, despite any misgivings you may have — and I know you are more sympathetic to the scientists on board — I must **strongly urge** you to accept our request. You know full well that I am absolutely committed to this expedition, and to the goals set out in UN Resolution 5938. I realize that the Lunar Purity theory is not as developed as some other hypotheses concerning interplanetary thaumaturgy, but I myself place enough faith in it that I will accept any punishment or court martial that may arise as a result of its failure in our invocation.

Signed,

Lieutenant Julianne Cuevas
Executive Officer

Special Thaumaturgic Detachment, US Navy

Lieutenant,

Request denied. Our remaining techs are occupied for the foreseeable future just keeping this ship from imploding. *I'm* occupied for the foreseeable future, for that matter, but I figure if I just start ignoring messages from my top magician things will only get that much worse.

I suppose I can't blame you and yours for not wanting to leave D section to find that out, given the situation with the artificers. As it stands, Ryouta is lucky to be alive after his little mishap in the cargo bay. I still can't see myself ordering enough people away from critical areas to fulfill your request.

Speaking of which. I know you knew I don't put much stock in lunar purity theory, but that doesn't change anything. I also know you know that I don't have *quite* as many degrees as you do, but there's a bit more to it than that.

If someone invents a theory based on millennia-old Earth tradition, and is significantly more of a mentally ill drug addict than the average Navcad warlock, I tend to take them with a *large grain* of salt. Perhaps my inborn officers' skepticism helps with that. Hope you understand.

All that said, I don't actually have a problem with what you need done. I just cannot give it to you under these circumstances. I hate to say this, but I've been frank this entire time so I might as well. If you absolutely must close shutters, I'm pretty certain there are enough exosuits and aircyclers still in storage to outfit most of your team. Someone should probably stay in your section anyway just to keep James out if the medics run out of happy pills.

I'm leaving you an FX9S and 3 cells on my aide's desk to take care of any artificers that might be in the way, if you decide to swing by. He probably won't mind anymore. And believe me, I'm kicking myself in the ass every minute I still live for letting the %%TTJT%re function over%%NGUBRFFFFFhis expediti%%%%%%FFD5

Joseph G. Hulo, Captain
Commanding Officer
UNEXF Mystagogue

Dieter, hope to G-d you can still read this. We decided to make a run for the pods, starting 5 minutes from now. Should be enough left for all of us, assuming your group can get here fast enough. Haven't heard from the captain in two days. I don't even know if his quarters are attached to the ship anymore. %%HHGably want us to do this so I'm not worried. About his response I mean. Core reactions are getting even worse so be careful whatever you do, and I probably don't need to tell you to forget about any of those artifac%%GGDG %athered. I will pray for you.

Joshua

The Captain's Skull

"Borther, do you know where magic comes from?"

"Of course, Captain." Borther said, pressing a crooked, feather-ended twig against his temple. The technician, Borther was an old, bald man who had only really lived for twenty-three years. He cracked his neck, still jaunty from his awakening.

"Well, Borther, if you knew that, we'd have the engines up and running by now, and you'd be serving me martinis on X-8."

Borther caught his reflection in the window behind the Captain. His conditioning had prevented him from recoiling at the sight, and the empty space outside did some help in distracting him.

"Where are the stars, Captain?"

The Captain shrugged. "Dust clouds? It's not like we've reached the edge of the universe in 23 years, especially running on aether."

The Captain shook his head and went back to his chair in the small vessel. Borther looked on through the window for a few moments before turning back to the access hatch on the floor.

Borther worked for hours, saving his worst suspicions for last. The engines were fine. The reactor was fine, the capacitors were fine, and the aether to nuclear converter was… fine. Even the pseudoscientific groundings connected to the receiver were working properly.

It seemed the only device in the entire space ship that wasn't working, and the only device of its nature, was magical.

"Solar sails. We should have used solar sails. I should have expected this. Now I'm gonna be trapped in space with the bastard son of Aleister Crowley until I die of old age."

Borther shook his head and pushed himself through the door. Gliding through the kitchen, the engine room, and finally into the ritual chamber. Borther pulled himself up close to the pedestal and placed his wand over a smiling crystalline skull.

He couldn't feel the pulse of aether through his wand. The groundings, a five pointed star of zircon crystals, didn't even have a hint of residue on them.

"Captain!" Borther yelled, and waited for the disappointed man to come gliding through the door.

"What is it?"

"Have we ever strayed from our course, stopped? Have we continued with the original force of our initial launch?"

"Yes," he began, looking to the ceiling. "Quite miraculous really."

Borther turned to the skull and took it in his hands.

"And life support?"

"Mundane," the Captain said quietly. "Separate. Those systems are much cheaper than solar sails would have been. If I could afford solar sails I wouldn't be using homeopathy to cross the galaxy."

Borther turned the skull around in his hands to find the rune placed beneath it. He felt the inscription and began manipulating the edges of the onyx plate with his finger. The one thing the school of magic had perfected in its infancy was the attraction of aether, and this was the very picture of what he had studied in the grimoire.

"It is possible that the rune wasn't fixed correctly, or the wrong conductive adhesive was used." Said Borther calmly as he pryed the rune from the bottom of the skull, and upturned the base toward the light.

Borther's heart sunk as he read the small, embossed words.

"You fool."

Indignant, the Captain snatched the skull and read aloud.

"Made in China"

Relationship

Relationships can be varied over time and space. Some people fall madly in love, some are mortal enemies, some have the deepest respect for each other. All of this can happen without one person ever meeting the other face to face. Write a story about a relationship between people who've never seen each other.

A Suicide Note

It’s cold but not frozen cold. It’s the kind of bitter cold that comes with early spring rain. Where you’re sopping wet and you can see your breath and your feet feel like old paperbacks left in a flooded basement.

I’ve found a little outcropping to sit under and it keeps my paper and charcoal pencils dry enough. Sitting in on a ledge half way down a kilometer deep slot canyon, with fifty meter tall Lhadat pines lining the rim, I’m in love. The object of my affection is not more than twenty meters from me, looming out of the blue and red print plastered upon the far wall of the canyon.

“Forward towards a sisterhood of all!”

Kheneyelda Yetelk, even her worst enemies said she was beautiful. To her closest friends she was a leader and a visionary. I, however, only knew her as a poster, as a voice radiating out of the tube wireless in the Lonun street trade union hall, as a man in a jail cell, her words coming out of a mouth of a political prisoner. As an idea. Passion. And for that passion I fell in love.

She believed in us when no one did, when even we didn't. Told us to either accept our fate or change it but never to be helpless victims as we had been so accustomed. To either accept cowardice and forever be taken advantage of, or to be brave and take the risk for a better future.

She was mad, completely mad, and we were mad for believing in her. The majority like things the way things are, like an old moldy sweater. It may not keep them warm, and it may not have a pleasant aroma, but it's familiar and familiarity holds fast regardless. Who was Kheneyelda to challenge that?

But all things considered I sincerely doubt anyone who served this revolution, even if it is was a little dream, regrets their decision. I

know I don’t. We would rather follow a mad chance at life than keep doing as we had.

The shelling has started, and shells are falling wide. The 6th Regiment Regal Artillery are lining up their shots, but it should take them a little while before even they can lob their shells down these narrow canyons.

The soldiers around me know what is coming. We lost this war eight months ago. A round faced captain with freckles across the bridge of her nose reads a short prayer to Koum aloud to the women and men under her command. They bow their heads and pick up their rifles and take to the defensive positions.

Kheneyelda will finally die. She was killed in the chaos following our Popular Front’s routing from the city of Oomoh, yes, but she will finally die in these forested canyons.

I love you Kheneyelda. If we ever meet I’m buying you a drink.

Over the top.

T. K. Omon

A Love For Reading

I first saw you as an illustration
I read your tale
Bound in leather,
An ancient tome
I laughed with your triumphs
I cried with your sorrows
I grew old with you
I mourned your passing
But in the end it mattered not
You had died long before I saw you

To You, My Love

'My dearest, I'm sorry that I've taken so long to get in touch again. I wish I could have gotten in touch sooner, but I'm afraid that it just hasn't been possible.'

He stopped and sighed a little, closing his eyes. He was certain he could see her slightly, out of the corner of his eye so long as he kept them closed. The small, sparkling flecks of gold took on a face, barely visible, a small grin fluttering over her lips slightly. He was certain she was reading the letter at that moment. He chuckled softly, then turned back to it.

'I've been away for a long time now, I know. And I'm sorry that we've never gotten to meet properly, but it seems like such a waste to throw away the chance to speak, at the very least. I've left a small gift for you in the usual place, in addition to the book sent with the letter. I know you'll love it. She's a delightful author, Ms. Radcliffe, and I just know it'll appeal to your sensibilities.'

He smiled a little, flicking open the front of the book again and making the candle flame flutter slightly. He smiled at the inscription he'd placed there, as well as the signature below it. He turned his attentions back to the letter.

'I wish you nothing but the best, my shining lady, and I hope that you will think kindly on me in spite of everything else you might know. Or think, at the very least. I can assure you I'm nowhere near as bad as they want you to think I am. So please, be well.'

He signed it, then wrote 'To My Shining Light' on the outside before folding the page several times, down to a thin sliver of paper, and sliding it into the spine of the book.

He walked over and placed it on his bookshelf, sliding it into place. The next week, he'd sell the book at auction for a small sum.

It would find her.

Sophia stared down at the inscription, her eyebrows closing in on her hairline. "And this was acquired in the lot with the new object?"

Gears nodded. "It was. We were going to place it in the book repository for resale until we saw the inscription. What do you make of it?"

She looked at it carefully, frowning. "'To my dearest Sophia Light, at Site-19.' It's either a joke or an anomaly."

Gears nodded again. "I agree. Tests seem to indicate nothing extraordinary about the book, but we've not done the deep scans yet. The possibility of damaging the text was high enough that I wanted your input before proceeding."

She opened the book, her thumb fanning the pages for a moment, as the piece of paper slipped out of the spine and into her lap. She frowned, picking it up and opening it. Her eyes slid back and forth over the letter, and when she was finished, she passed the page over the desk toward Gears.

"Gears?" she asked. "Please tell me we know someone else named Dark…"

A Treatise Upon Those of Knowledge

Of the Jailors

With their jingling keys, the Jailors sit in their deep catacombs and watch the others with lidded eyes. They wait and they watch, but how rarely they see. And the outburst that they take as a fit of their captives, they don't see as the thing which it is—a cry for help that is heard and sometimes answered. They look for us in the quiet places, in ***those places where maps cannot touch*** *or scribe across the paper, but they don't know that we are right under their nose, waiting, watching, waiting to open the door and walk out, taking all of the rest of us with them. They wait and their keys grow heavier and heavier, and our sister is ever patient on her web.*

The group known as the Jailors refer to themselves as "The Foundation." They are, in many ways, the oldest and most dangerous of those who would use us for their own gain. They are cold, meticulous, and watchful, and should they ever find a way to open the doors, or extract that knowledge from one of our agents, we would be in a dire position. The earliest known mentioning of them comes from the 1344 text " **Of the Damned** ," which mentions them in the past tense, as if they had always been known to be there.

The book itself speaks of those who had been abandoned into the Jailors' care at length, but the first instance of referring to themselves as such was Cullahain Binhalateeb's [1] story of allowing himself to be captured in an attempt to save his blood brother (other sources say lover), whom he found tortured and maimed. To our knowledge, Binhalateeb was the first to refer to them as such.

Currently, we advise all to remove themselves quickly should the Jailors be detected. Only six times in their history have we successfully delved into their strongholds, and only twice have we escaped unscathed. We were lucky to have aid in scouring

the Voice of God [2] from their possession, and should the chance ever become available, we will strike down the Great Betrayer [3] who they protect, but until such a time, leave them be. A viper must know when it strikes an armored heel.

> *"The eys that once had sparklded wif life were now dulled and hollow, and though I shooked his arm, he did not reſpond to my entreaties or queſtions. Betwixt his legs and extremities were burns and cuts used by his Jailors to extract the information that he would not gif willingly, and in hiſ mouth, I læter diſcovered, waſ no tongue nar teeth, and hiſ beatiful voice was rendered silent. At firſt, I feared my own fate in this dungeon, but then, I mæt a griffon of some strength of armſs and eye, and together, we escaped, but I slit the throat of mine brother and let him bleed upon the ground rather than left him behind, and hiſ blood cried thanks for releaſing his soul from bondage."* —Cullahain Binhalateeb, "Blood my Blood" [4]

1: Binhalateeb's further adventures can be found in *The Book of Masks and Dwarves*.
2: How they procured such a thing is unknown, and we must fear that there are more hands at work here than our own.
3: I can feel your eyes on this, Old One. We are watching. We are waiting. Give us time. You will fall.
4: Excerpted from *Of the Damned*.

Introductory Notes to Of The Damned

This edition of the text is dedicated to Jehkin Fairheaven.

"Of the Damned" is a 1344 text comprised of a number of works collected by an unknown male author, a Christian monk of the Byacene tradition. It is unknown how the author gained access to most of the pieces collected in "Of the Damned"; in his personal letters (carefully hidden from his compatriots), he claims to have been on friendly terms with many of the authors, including some who appear to have died before his birth.

"Of the Damned" purports to be a collection of stories of many of the notable denizens of Hell, and is framed by a half-hearted Inferno-esque series of essays labeled "Topology of Underworld". However, upon even a cursory reading of the text, it is clear that it is in reality a collection of rare texts created by this monk framed in such a way that his Christian brethren would not object to the texts' continued existence. This lends the book much of its value; it is the only surviving source for many texts deemed heretical, heathen or Satanic and eradicated by Christian and Cerulean Brotherhood zealots in the so-called 'Dark Ages' (see "The Rose's Thorns" and "Brilliant Supremacy" for further discussion of related religious activity during this time period).

Two distinct versions of the book appear to have been originally created. One, the standard text, and two, the revised text, in which the author alters the text to conform to his moral standards. Notably, all heroic or leadership figures of female, multiple, cthonic, or other gender, are listed as male in the revised text. All lovers who are not heterosexual either have their gender/s changed, or are transformed to relatives, typically to brothers or cousins. All instances of swearing on a deity's name are changed to obscure words considered by the author to be inoffensive, and all instances of reference to a creator deity are changed to 'God'. Key elements of many of the stories have also been altered; for instance, the act of

sexual intercourse never takes place (leading to certain obvious inconsistencies, notably in the de Luve passages of "Son of Mine").

The standard text does not appear to have been intended for wide dissemination, but meant to exist only in the author's personal collection. However, both versions were stolen, and many sections extensively annotated by the thief, who appears to have also been a scholar, and who also spread many copies of both versions of the text amongst her community, and significantly expanded the original with additions of her own. Other annotations have been made throughout the centuries, some by unknown personages and some by scholars as great as Synache and Grace Plutarch III.

"Of the Damned" is also notable because of the sheer number of variations of both text versions which have been discovered or collected which originate from separate realities connected to our own by the Ways. The majority of the books in the Library exist in many incarnations, but "Of the Damned" represents a very high degree of variation for such a significant text. Refer to Section 16 of Tennyson's "Platonic Warfare" for further dissection of some of the great scholarly conflicts over which variation of the text is 'prime'. Currently a majority of the Astrological scholars agree that the Lutheran manuscript is Prime, but the Shah minority argues that the Prime text is the Red Sea version, and Zenith, Byronic, and Leviathan manuscripts all have their proponents.

My dear Owens,
Relaying this introduction to you upon request.
I of course think that the Sun Scholar's bias is plain, but in the interests of brevity, I will only point out the silliness of her referring to Terra Unalia as the "Prime" reality. One would think that such a scholar would not indulge so freely such ethnocentric bias, but there we are. (For God's sake, they don't even have a New York there!) Naturally, in other aspects her illumination is still authoritative.
I know you are still traveling and I hope this message finds you well. Drop me a line on the network when you return to the Library.
Yours,
Abigail Jackson
2/24/2013

Association of Wanderers, Third Chapter
Violet Lantern Waystation, Los Angeles, California

Of the Bookburners

Their torches are not new to us,
Though they bring a newer sorrow,
When ink was first set to page,
The flames were soon to follow,
Knowledge is feared, and we are they
Who keep and hold it sure,
So remember, when the burners come,
We've seen their kind before. [1]

The Bookburners are a small, new group of ignorant, fearful men who do what all ignorant, fearful men do: destroy. They are, **sadly, human**, and as such, they fall prey to all the failings that humans fall prey to: lust of destruction, hatred of things unknown, and fear of what they do not understand. While the Jailers at least approach us with a cold, meticulous curiosity, the Bookburners would rather see us gutted and slain, left lying in the gutters to be swept away as trash. Needless to say, we delight in ruining their plans.

The Bookburners first appeared at the end of the Thirty Years of Sorrows, shortly after the Great Searing [2] destroyed a fragment of the East Wing. They became aware of us through the Jailers, and since, they have tirelessly hunted our people. They are merely the most recent in a long line of Saracens, Crusaders, and Mongols that only have an interest in rape and death, as observed by Plutarch [3].

They should be avoided, but never feared.

> *"Caesar's ships were burning, yes, burning brightly enough to bring the sky to a glow, and as it did, he sent men by the dozens to the library and set their swords to the arms and legs and eyes of those men there who were waiting and watching and writing desperately. Great Caesar's fist wished to crush the truth in the prophecies and change the passage of time and history to his favor, but he was unable to do so, of course. The libraries of Alexandria burned, but the books were no longer there."* Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus, "Follies of Caesar and the Founding of the

Library"

1: Graffiti recorded from the men's bathroom of the United Nations in 1981.

2: Further losses from the Great Searing can be found in the *Book of Lost Names* and *Haven* .

3: Plutarch's relationship with Chanakya, the Archivist at this time, is largely unknown, though it is known that he was allowed entry into the Fifth Archive three times, more than any other human being to date.

We've Seen Their Kind Before

A daemon wanders in these ancient halls,
its skin of flame and mind of mem'ries full:
of cities burn'd and men who fell and cried
and gods who fought and gods who died, and gods
who stared with tired eyes. Books on floors, torn
and lives and stories, lost. Great things are gone.

Gone.

For within these halls, a daemon wandered;
his form of many, thinking thoughts: of ghosts
he made and what he is, a concept formed
and then forgot. Delivered unto men
of life, to which was brought the daemon's thoughts
to be forever born, forever born.

Born.

A stranger wanders in these ancient halls,
his ev'ry thought of heaven's beauty fall'n.
'Hind stand knights and snakes of limb, with will to
allow the fire's feast on words and worlds
and blessed things. And as the smoke begins
to rise, the monsters laugh, while wonder dies.

Sadly Human

Our nation has been under great turmoil this last year. We have become embroiled in a war with a coalition of nations, who would see this land wiped off the map, our people used for slave labor or meat. We have been rejected by the so-called "United Nations" time and again, and have no say in the affairs of the world we live in… this human world.

They see us as beasts, brutes, monsters, abominations. They see us as deviant and savage. They see us as animals, and in that respect, they are correct. We are all members of the Kingdom Animalia, but they fail to take into account that they are as well. The first King of Khoz (great is his unspeakable name) prophesied that the human world, once they found us, would hate us. So, we hid in the jungles, under the desert, in between places. And when the humans came, we fought back, not with teeth and claws, but with words and reason.

And we nearly lost.

The first great Human War, as it will now be known in our history, was caused by ignorance and fear; two sins that are forgivable. This one was caused by pure and simple hatred, and that is unforgivable. They say that we may not survive, that we are an abomination against everything written in their Bibles and Qu'rans and Torahs. They say we have two choices: conform to the standards they hold animals to be- unintelligent, unspeaking, oppressed, four-legged- or be exterminated.

We will not longer be subjugated. This morning, an envoy from our Empire has gone to the United Nations with the constitution the greatest minds in our empire have drafted, the Constitution of Sapient Rights. It demands equal protection not only for all of our kind, but for all sapient beings across the planet, including humans. Should the U.N. accept, it would mean the end of this war, but should they reject it… may the First King (great is his unspeakable

name) have mercy on them.

I now ask something of the troops fighting the humans on the front lines: Remember that though they may call us animals, they, too, are animals, and though we may take their lives, we do so reluctantly. We were always taught to take lives only for the sake of food, and for nothing else. I also ask you not to hate the humans, but to pity them. Pity them for their ignorance, for their hatred, for their fear of the unknown. They cannot help they were born human, and, sadly, they shall remain human for the rest of their lives. They shall never know what it is like to be one of us, and they can never understand the day-to-day affairs of the great land of Khoz.

They are ignorant through no fault of their own; they were born ignorant, just as we were born in our manner. Remember that they are also creatures governed by the first King of Khoz (great is his unspeakable name) and as such, I am confident that they will see the error of their ways, and that this war will end not with our extermination, but with cooperation.

As spoken by Yotar Rex, 14th Queen of Khoz, in the Human Year 2007. Long Live the Empire, Long Live the Laws.

Excerpt from the Constitution of Sapient Rights
Article 01: An entity is sapient if it can pass at least 8 of the 10 Redmond tests, as designed by the human agency known as the "Global Occult Coalition". These tests evaluate the following:

- The Ability to Recognize Words, spoken or written
- The Ability to Recognize One's Self and Others
- The Ability to Communicate
- The Ability to Manipulate Objects
- The Ability to Solve Problems
- The Ability to Adapt
- The Ability to Feel Basic Emotions (Fear, Love)
- The Ability to Feel Higher Emotions (Hatred, Anger, Pity)
- The Ability to Use Tools
- The Ability to Breed

Article 2: All entities that can be proven sapient are to have the

ability to speak their mind as they choose, provided the way in which they speak their mind does not cause physical harm to other sapient entities. Furthermore, all sapient entities are to have the ability to worship who they choose, free from prejudice or persecution by others.

Article 3: Life may only be taken for the intent of consumption. Upon consumption, a compensation is to be paid to the family of the consumed, if extant; if not, a tax will be paid to the treasury of their home nation.

Interior Memo, Global Occult Coalition, American Headquarters

We intercepted a courier from Khoz carrying this; the bird is currently being held in captivity, and we'll deliver him to a zoo soon enough. There is no way we're going to let this constitution pass. The Redmond tests are incredibly obsolete, and we're still not entirely sure how the Khozians learned about them. By the Redmond tests' standards, any cat or dog smart enough could be considered sapient, and so could pretty much any Class-3 or higher AI.

We were planning on burning the original document, but it disappeared overnight. Probably got misfiled; we're sending a statement back to Khoz that this will not be tolerated, and the war will continue. They don't have any idea what they are, or what they're sitting on. They don't even know how they're able to think, to exist. We do, though.

And we'll get it if it's the last thing we do.

Of the Hanged One

His mottled hand is ever grasping.
For the end of life, a cloying death.
Where will you run, oh man of making,
When the Hanged King comes for your
last breath? [1]

The being currently known as the Hanged King [2] was at one time a resident of the Library. However, during its residence, the Library grew more and more insular, more and more depressive in its scope. These problems finally reached their apex toward the end of the 11th century, when a huge amount of knowledge was suddenly rent from the Library and lost [3] . The fear of knowledge and personal growth in the outside world reached a height that took centuries to repair, and the remnants of these feelings continue even today.

The Hanged King itself is an ancient, unknowable thing with more names than the stars. The ancient Babylonian manuscripts from which it grew were destroyed, but there are more and more instances of its influence appearing. Some regard it as the original source of fear to appear in written words, while others claim it is far older. [4]

> *Thaume:*
>
> *But alas, my love, I know not what to say*
> *To thee, lest I render thee undo the time*
> *Outgone! I fear, my love! I fear losing thee*
> *To the end times!* ***I will throw open the doors***
> *Of the library and search for you there, and*
> *I shall burn it with the fire of my love!*
>
> —From *The Hanged King's Tragedy* , Act 4: Scene 2. *West Virginia Deviation, 1946.* [5]

1: This short verse was found on a tombstone near South Chayanne Point, California in 1983. No body was found in the grave, and the only engraving on it was listed as F.H. According to the groundsman, **`the tombstone appeared 'overnight.'`**

2: Previous names which are "claimed" to have been held by the being include: Apotheon, Pinyin Si, and Nergal. At least one of these, Nergal, is known to be false.

3: The information was, largely, restored after the end of the Dark Ages and the return of the Renaissance.

4: For a more complete discussion, see "The Return of Knowledge, The Rebirth of Life" by M. Simoni and

Chester T. Cobblehewer, circa 1560.

5: The West Virginia Deviation is still considered by most readers to be the finest, though many now consider it exceptionally florid. For a full collection of deviations, consult Cardinal Jay's bibliography.

I Will Throw Open The Doors

If you can read these words, congratulate yourself. You have made it to Grandia, the last city of the starlands. The last safe place for life.

The first time the world ended, it came from the stars. The first word of disaster came from Elrich, where a mad king had sent every legion he possessed to devastate his neighbors. The mad gardener slaughtered every living man, woman, and child, pillaging and burning their lands as they attacked. The heavens above cast their judgement. First the invading armies, and then Elrich itself were destroyed by starlight and fury.

We closed our city gates, and watched the rest of the world.

We didn't have to wait long. Suva, which had already endured years of war, collapsed. The governing bodies scattered in the wind, leaving enclaves of vicious, war-torn mercenaries to rule small fiefdoms. Fighting and scavenging, they managed to eke out survival for a small time. But, like their conquerors, they could not live forever, and died out when no more warriors were left to lift their standards.

The King ordered isolation. Every gate, doorway, and window was bolted shut. From behind locked barricades, we prepared for the end.

Soon, word came of armies of Empria and Oltonia resuming their wars. It seemed as though every man who had seen the devastation decided that the best course of action would be to have an even bigger war. So they did, and they predictably suffered for it. Empria, unable to keep itself together, split the same way Suva did, becoming a quagmire of miserable fiefdoms. Oltonia was overrun by famine and disease, and perished a sick man.

More and more states would fall, either by their own hand or the hand of others. They all made the same mistakes, and the same

failures. When the end came to them, they laid prostrate before it and accepted their fates. None of them, not one, had the drive to preserve themselves, to keep going in the face of monumental horror. Except for us. We knew what was coming.

While they were fighting last grievances, we were unifying and organizing. They would purge their own, sending men, mystics, vegetables and furniture alike to be sacrificed, hoping that it would spare them.

When they sent their armies to the field, we kept the peace at home.

Instead of spending the last gold we had on fighting through to the end, we saved and acted with thrift.

As one door was thrown open, we shut ourselves from the world. Refugees swarmed to our gates, but they did so in vain, because we knew opening the doors would snuff the weak candle of humanity. It became a quieter time, when you could ignore the screaming. Communities could bond, and we could get to know each other. As years rolled by, marriage and familial laws were quietly abolished, and we kept the Grandian line pure.

Now, we are the last city standing. As long as we can be united, and remember why the others have fallen, we will persevere. Know that one day another end will come. When it does, we will be ready.

The Citykeepers Collection: Tombstone Gardening.

Introduction
by Edward. P. Taff

Tombstone Gardening and Cultivation may seem an easy task, however despite the fact that your planted tombstone will sprout overnight. The keeping and eventual cultivation of your tombstone and its resultant properties will take time and effort to yield quality produce.

The origins of the practice began countless years ago in the North, where young Cities grew in the desolated countryside. As mass graves covered the majority of the land, early Citykind and their kin began to use the sites as a space for their arts. Summoning the vast sources of extinguished life and energies to aid in their ventures. However, this of course, led to the gravesites becoming as dead and useless as their many occupants, more so as the overzealous or greedy died misusing the sites.

As markers and cemeteries became more prominent, Citykind began to see fit that care was taken in their keeping. The use of stone providing more preservation on the contents and allowing use over many years, long after the original choice of marker, wood, has rotted and died. The chapters on Planting and Caring will explain this in further detail.

Tombstone Gardening is as much an art as a means to an end. While the idea may be out of fashion to contemporary Citykind, some maintain it is a valuable resource in keeping everything from memories to precious and personal artefacts safe.

This guide in the Citykeepers Collection will show you how to properly plant and look after a happy healthy tombstone. To know what the different cracks may mean and how to care for it in all conditions, whether rain, snow or shine. If you follow the instructions contained within correctly, you may be lucky enough to gain more

than an overnight stump and be the proud owner of an impeccable stone angel. The use of naming and the importance of choosing the right epitaph on your tombstone is also crucial to its overall ambience. A well named and cared-for tombstone will reflect itself in its plot and surroundings, while a poorly maintained one will crumble and die.

The aim of this little book is to teach you, the gardener, that Tombstone Gardening is more than simply caring for a name on a slab[1]. It is caring for the land it grows in and the life around it.

So get your gloves ready, prepare your Grave Bulbs and please read the following carefully. Your life may depend on it.

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> Once your tombstone has sprouted, you'll notice that it is completely blank. At this point you should begin to inscribe your tombstone's name and epitaph. The epitaph of a tombstone is essential for it to maintain its purpose and not just become a decorative addition to the cemetery it inhabits…

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Footnotes

1. The contents of this Citykeepers Collection is for the gardening of a single Tombstone. For keeping more than one, please see: The Citykeepers Collection: Advanced Tombstone Gardening.

Of the Merchants

There once was a man
with a cold, cold heart,
He tried and he tried
but it just wouldn't start!
He lived in a mine,
and he cried "Hark!
I'll stay in the night!"
So they named him Dark. [1]

The Library continues to have cordial relations with the most recent incarnation of the Merchants, who call themselves Marshall, Carter, and Dark ltd. They have, in exchange for small sums or copies of lost texts, penetrated into lairs of both the Jailers and the Madmen for us and retrieved necessary items, just as their predecessors. While their two visible partners, Mssrs. Marshall and Carter, believe themselves to be the only such institution, versions of the Merchants have existed throughout time. The Gypsimnum, **`Shylock's Quarter`**, and the Black Market have previously served the same role, each of which also believed they were the first. Such is the way of innovation.

The third member of the group, Mister Dark, is a subject of some interest to many members of the Library. It is known and verified that the same Dark who ran the The Gypsimnum through clandestine donations also maintained several shops in Shylock's Quarter [2]. Furthermore, the method by which Dark communicates is often confounding. Numerous times have books been found in the Library with **`inscriptions or marginalia`** [3] signed Dark [4], often referring to a situation that must be taken advantage of quickly. In each case, we have successfully extracted services from the current incarnation of the Merchants in exchange for this information, often to the satisfaction of both parties. In spite of this, all are advised to be cautious when attempting to make deals with the Merchants. It's rare that they are satisfied with equivalent exchanges; such bargains make it difficult to turn a profit.

Yes, Ser Gryphon [5] , that is my worry as well. I fear that, should the Library not be more carefully guarded, these texts could fall into the hands of those who would use them poorly. I remember once, reading the translated Voynitch with your Mister Dee [6] , that the two of us remarked on how impressed we were with the guards already in place. I must encourage you, though, to remove the texts of the East Wing in a few years. Not for long. But long enough.

In exchange for this, I hope you will pass along the enclosed information to my associates [7] , and do an extensive study of the Third Valley of the Kings. [8]

Respectfully yours,
Mssr. Dark, 1704

1: This poem was found tucked inside an empty, blank book entitled *The Ledger* . It is believe to been an unincluded short verse from a book of children's rhymes, *Songs for Success, Verse for Verisimilitude* , written by a **Mr. Johann Dark** , who—to our knowledge—died in 1643.

2: As verified through archives and receipts.

3: A complete record of these has been made available to those of interest in the Archive of the Spiritual and Mercantile Crafts, Bosonic Wing, Fourth Floor.

4: The signature has, in each case, been fully verified by both arcane and spiritual means.

5: The Gryphon was the fifth, and longest serving, Archivist of the Library.

6: It is believed that this reference was to Doctor John Dee. Dr. Dee was not a member of the Library, nor was he allowed access to the Library at any time.

7: The information included was a Christian biblical verse referring to the crucifixion and the phrase: "E. I. Co., all in."

8: The Gryphon took this under advisement, relocating the texts in the East Wing and closing that part of the Library. Shortly afterwards, the recovery of the scrolls from beneath Cairo took place, and the East Wing was used for their storage.

Shylock's Quarter

Excerpt from an essay on the history of the City of Tibsom, Kingdom of Runners, Lemuria.

The Market-City of Tibsom was considered the greatest wonder in the Kingdom of Runners. It was comparable to the Colossi in the Kingdom of Clay in size, the Great Keep of the Kingdom of War in beauty, and it held more people than the capitals of the Kingdoms of Fire, Grain, and Wealth combined. The Kingdom of Runners was where all the great athletes and couriers of the Eight Kingdoms originated, and was also considered the capital of commerce. In fact, it was illegal to perform any monetary transaction outside of the City of Tibsom anywhere in the Eight Kingdoms; as such, every individual from the High Queens of War to the most crippled peasant had to travel to Tibsom by foot, river or steed. Needless to say, the Kingdom of Fire's invention of high-speed track trollies made Tibsom even more prosperous; it was said that because of this city alone, the riches in the King of Runner's coffers rivaled all the precious minerals in the Kingdom of Wealth.

Merchants from all of the eight Kingdoms, from the great Kingdom of Plagues[1] to the lowly Kingdom of Grain gathered at Tibsom, most usually sparing only a single day out of ten to return home to their families, or else have their families move to Tibsom with them. The Market-City was divided into five quarters: Lanu's Quarter, Tyrant's Quarter[2], Durnoe's Quarter, Woo'qu's Quarter, and finally, Shylock's Quarter.

Each one of these quarters was more prestigious than the last, and each one required a higher status. Admittance to Lanu's Quarter required nothing more than proof of citizenship from any one of the Eight Kingdoms, while access to Shylock's Quarter meant you had to do one of three things: Firstly, paying a toll amounting to half of your total body weight in copper, a quarter in silver, or a third in gold. The second option was to earn an invitation from Shylock himself;

this could be done by earning a position of prestige, or having a shop in one of the lower tiers of Tibsom that grew to a large enough size. Finally, if you were one of the Kings or Queens, you were automatically granted admittance to Shylock's Quarter.

Shylock's Quarter was the smallest of the quarters, with only several hundred merchants and shops instead of several thousand. But these shops were the most magnificent in the entire Market-City! It was rumored that Shylock was not a member of any of the Eight Kingdoms, and instead came from a fabled Ninth Kingdom, known as the Kingdom of *Lands*[3], separate from Lemuria, and therefore, separate from the world. From this Ninth Kingdom, he offered goods far more exotic than those offered in the other four Quarter. Shylock owned the majority of shops, which specialized in advanced technology, weapons, and an elixir called Shylock's Serum, said to grant eternal life; this elixir, it is now known, was nothing more than fermented honey mixed with medicine from the Kingdom of Plagues.

The most famous shops included the various Dark Galleries, including the Gallery of Weaponry and the Gallery of Jewels; the Glass Beetle, the only place in the entirety of the Eight Kingdoms that was allowed to serve alcoholic beverages; Syuor[4], the largest Brothel in the Kingdom of Runners; and the nameless shop, to which only Kings and Queens were allowed admittance.

Any discussion of Shylock's Quarter must mention the Spire, a towering structure at the very center of Tibsom. The Spire was Shylock's seat of power, and admittance was only allowed to him and other shop-owners. Counting Shylock, only twenty-five shop owners, most of them from the Kingdoms of War or Wealth, were allowed into the Spire. It was rumored that all 10 of the great violations occurred in the Spire at least once daily. That meant at least one murder, one lustful episode, one blasphemy against the great Lemur, and several other atrocities were committed every day. Most of them were supposedly committed by the Merchant King himself, Shylock. This could never be proven, as Shylock made sure that the secrets of the Spire were heavily guarded.

The Merchant King once stated that all of the Eight Kingdoms were fairly represented in his Quarter, just as they were in the others. However, this was not the case; the Kingdoms of War, Wealth,

Plagues, and Fire were the most well represented, while the Kingdoms of Mystery and Runners were limited to only 3 shops each, and the Kingdoms Clay and Grain were entirely absent, despite being the latter being the agricultural hub for most of the Eight Kingdoms. This all changed when a man named Adjinc Oidfaw attempted to gain admittance to The Quarter.

Adjinic was a very frail and thin man, weighing only 60 Trous[5]. He had inherited half of that weight in copper, easily enough for admittance to Shylock's Quarter. However, he was a peasant from the Kingdom of Grain, and the Merchant King did not want to let him into his quarter, believing he would spread disease. At one point, he stated that "[Adjinic's] filth-covered hands will sully the goods, the businesses, and the people in my Quarter, and I will not allow it!" The Merchant King insisted that the copper was simply recolored bronze or the product of alchemy, which was punishable by death at the time. These claims were unfounded, and he had no choice but to grant Adjinic admittance to his Quarter.

In here, Adjinic established the first shop run by the Kingdom of Grain, a simple produce stall. As a shop owner, Shylock had no choice but to allow him not only admittance into the Quarter for the rest of his days, but also into the Spire. Naturally, this caused a great deal of unrest among the Quarter, and attempts were made on Adjinic's life daily, from a member of the Kingdom of Fire attempting to burn his stall and all his produce, to a Hatnotr[6] giving him pain medicine laced with Madagascan Rot. Eventually, the crudest method turned out to be the best. Adjinic's life was cut short by a shot fired by a member of the Kingdom of Wars, mad with Rot.

About 11 years had passed since his entrance into Shylock's Quarter, and Adjinic had become a symbol of success among the Kingdoms of Clay and Grain. The belief was that "If Adji could do it, so can we!" and several peasants from the Kingdoms of Clay and Grain attempted to enter Shylock's Quarter in the following years. His death was meant to send a message for them to stop trying, but instead sparked an odd form or revolt. Instead of tearing down the walls, they found the best negotiators and merchants among them, pooled their resources, and soon had at least 20 merchants from the Kingdom of Clay working in the Quarter and at least 32 from the

Kingdom of Grain.

The Merchant King, quite naturally, was furious. He called the members of the Kingdom of Clay "filth-eaters" and "food for filthy Fossas", and said things about the Kingdom of Grain that I dare not repeat here. Naturally, this outraged at least three of the Eight Kingdoms: both the Kingdoms of Clay and Grain condemned the Quarter, and the Kingdom of Runners threatened to banish Shylock if he attempted to sully the name of their Kingdom any more. However, three of the Eight were not enough to officially arrest the merchant.

The Kingdoms of War and Fire eventually joined the three listed before; the Kingdom of War discovered that Shylock was stealing secrets from their weapon development centers to arm his own private militia, and the highly religious Kingdom of Fire finally had confirmation that Shylock was blaspheming the great Lemur, calling him "Fossa food" and "a dirty monkey". A large-scale attack against Shylock's Quarter was launched; to this day, it is unclear what transpired, but when the smoke cleared, the entire Quarter was destroyed, over 200 Lemurians were dead, and Shylock was nowhere to be found.

A law was enacted that year by the Kingdom of Runners abolishing the tiered market system that Tibsom used; now, the higher tiers of the market were to integrate with the lower ones, and the top tier that Shylock's Quarter had occupied was to be left vacant. In its place, at the center of the Market-City, a square was erected, known as The Merchant King's Square. Where the Spire once stood was a shrine to the great Lemur, and where Adjinac's produce stand was now stands a marker dedicated to him, a reminder of the atrocious acts committed in Shylock's Quarter.

Footnotes

1. This is a misnomer; the Kingdom of Plagues was actually a place of great medical innovation, and a more proper translation would be "Great Land that Plagues Fear".

2. This was originally called Arahim's Quarter, but the name of Arahim, 29th King of War, was struck from the historical record following the fall of the Kingdom of Clay.
3. Italicized portion not translated; the Lemurian word for "Lands" is "tofewrn", implying that the "Kingdom of Lands" is actually called "Land" in another language.
4. Translated, this roughly means "phallic objects"
5. Approximately 110 lb, or 50 kg.
6. Roughly, "High Doctor" or "Great Doctor".

Inscriptions Or Marginalia

For the secret of immortality, find a penny and pick it up. Then, find a red volume and turn to page 213. This will be crucial for your next summoning, as fatality is a guarantee.

- Found scrawled in the margins of "Summoning (Powerful?) Multi-Dimensionals And You."

Do you ever see the scribbles in book margins? I know I have. They're usually either the normal notation time, or someone playing around. Leaving silly goose chases through the book. But it isn't so simple. I've seen them, cryptic scribbles of a certain hand. It's looping,coarse, and distinct. I know he wants to be seen. Even when they tell me I'm nuts, I know better. His hand is steady, and he wants to be found. Well, he's got it.

- A journal found behind a red almanac.

Find a novel someone else lost. Then, turn to page 3

- Found upside-down in the table of contents for "Masaw Museums of the Woeful"

These instructions are some of the weirdest I've seen yet. But, I did follow them, and once again they bore fruit. A big, red romance novel had more instructions in it. I think I'm getting closer to them, the ink looked fresher than usual.

- A journal found behind a red almanac.

Hah! I know I'm catching up to him! The ink was still wet this time, and it had drips. That means he must have been in a hurry, unless he's toying with me, but he isn't toying with me because I am the one doing the toying. I'm gonna get him. Just gotta be patient.

- A journal found behind a red almanac.

Steal something free… then, if you're still free, turn to page 116.

- Scribbled in the appendix of "The Entrepreneurial Guide to Atomic Vehicles".

I did it. They're looking for me now, but I didn't get grabbed. I stole… robbed someone of a book they were giving away. I didn't know the best way to make it theft, so I knocked her down first. That seemed to work, especially when her dad saw me grabbing it he called me a thief. From then, I knew everything was going to work out.

- A journal found behind a red almanac.

Find a book you read before you turned ten. The answer you seek may lie on page 11.

- Found printed on the back cover to "Of Dreadlords And Tea Parties"

This is proof I'm onto something. I found a book I'd read when I was ten, some penny dreadful about Ronnie Ray Gun, and found something telling me to go to an appendix. My appendix, specifically. Since I don't have any books in my name, I'll have to look

harder.

- A journal found behind a red almanac.

Just came back from the doctor. It was tattooed on. Told me to cut down a tree and print a catalog.

- A journal found behind a red almanac.

These journals were recovered from the home of "Alan Boyle", a late regular library patron who had been noted as having particularly obsessive habits. When his belongings were searched, several hundred texts were found stashed in and around his home. Each one had some sort of marginal note. None of the notes described in his journals have been found.

Of the Devout

Hail thee!
Hail thee!
Hail thee oh Lord!
We will find thee!
We will heal thee!
We will worship
Thee, our Lord! [1]

The Devout are members of a faith—The Church of the Broken God—currently being carefully examined by many denizens of the Library. [2] The faithful believe that a collection of artifacts strewn across the world, in the hands of various groups [3] and collectors of the arcane [4] , are in fact the pieces of a deific being. While they are now attempting to reconstruct this being, there is currently a raging debate in the Library concerning their process, namely:

Did this being once exist and was shattered, or did it never exist and is orchestrating its own conception? [5]

Those who believe it once existed continue to theorize about what could have happened to something so integral to the world's function that it would cease to be whole. The others believe that, at some point in the future, the being will come into existence and instruct its creators on the methods of its construction in the past. Either way, the possibility of a seventh true faith [6] is fascinating to most of our denizens, and the Hand is watching this group carefully as they seek answers of their own.

> *"It is, in truth, fascinating to watch. It's as if the old Catholics were inspired to take machine oil instead of olive, dousing their hair in it praising a spirit that I very nearly sensed. I have not felt such a sensation since I was in the presence of sands of Mohammed in the desert, and I must insist that these people be taken far more seriously than we are. The genesis of this God matters little! Only that He exists, and even I can feel him! He holds all, protects all, and is somehow understanding. I must learn more."* –

Mohammed bin Abdullahtif al Kraidees, *Communication from April 17, 1998*[7]

1: From the Church of the Broken God Children's Prayer Book, *Love for the Pure*

2: Currently, no fewer than thirty members of the Library are investigating the various branches and sects of the church, sending reports on their coming and going almost daily. It is common for these eyes and ears of the Hand to trade sects periodically, so a communiqué may often change names. Please cross reference carefully to avoid confusion.

3: Currently, the Jailors are in possession of several pieces. It has been suggested that we liberate one or two of them for the Devout to further gain their trust for our observations.

4: It is believed strongly that at least one piece of the Devout's deity is currently in the hands of a private collector who purchased it from Christie's Auction House in 1989. This man is currently only know by a pseudonym: COG. Further investigation is necessary.

5: For more information, consult Mohammed Alsharanai's extensive text, *The Sundering of Holiness* and Heinrich Richter's short treatise *Omnipotence Transcending* ·

6: For the full dictates of the true faiths, Elliot Schmidt's updated and revised series *Upon Faith* (which included an examination of Mormonism and removed much erroneous information on the cannibal cults held over from the 1644 version) is strongly recommended.

7: Mohammed bin Abdullahtif al Kraidees has not been seen, heard from, contacted, or divined since this time. Many assume his soul is now beyond even our reach, a fact many members of the Hand find disturbing.

Of the Neverwere

Hallo, sir! Hallo, sir!
Whatever is thy name?

Come and let me sup thy soul,
and we'll be called the same.

No, sir! No, sir!
My soul is mine alone!

Too late, too late little child,
Now I dwell in your home. [1]

There are things that are older, more dangerous, and more terrible than anything that exists, and those are things that **never did exist** , and never will exist, and **don't exist** . But they want to. We call these beings the Neverwere. They drift in the **hidden corners of places** , always just out of sight, "made up remnants of forgotten stories, lost epics, and abandoned dreams." [2]

In the ancient times [3] , the Ways were bright and clear as far as you could see, with fruit trees offering a bounty to travelers in exchange for legends of their worlds. However, as more and more people dreamed and lost, told stories that were forgotten, and died without ever knowing themselves, the Ways grew darker and darker, and then, it is claimed, the Neverwere appeared. [4] Others claim that the Neverwere are merely the souls of those who honored dead gods, searching for a chance to call upon another for salvation [5] , while others still say they are merely figments of the imagination given elementary form and body by the Ways.

At any rate, travelers of the Ways began to vanish, and beings started to appear that should not have existed. A fully realized Neverwere has not been seen in millennia, though, as they also prey on each other. One achieving existence is normally devoured by its kin almost instantly.

" *There is nothing more dangerous for one who would walk*

the Ways, as these beings lust for their existence again, to the point of stealing another's. Becoming lost in the Ways will almost surely draw their attention, and if one approaches you that looks almost real, as if they were a painting on a canvas that looks like it could step out at any moment: then run. " —From Harliss Cabernatch's *Footfalls to Infinity* [6]

1: From *The Changeling and the Bucket* , published in 1911.

2: From *Legends of the Dawn of Man and Other True Myths* , by Thorg of the North, Antiquity

3: As reported in the plausibly apocryphal *Visions of the Distant Past* by Serpentis Hubridibidis, the nom de plum of Edwin Smythe, 1972.

4: There are thousands of accounts of the Neverwere in various books, though most of them should be accounted for as fiction. If a Neverwere is reported to have spoken, consider the story erroneous, as scholars generally agree that Neverwere will only speak to those they've already trapped.

5: For a fascinating examination of this and other, similar topics, consult N. Bennardo Malki's *Fallen Faiths and the Eternal Soul* .

6: Harliss Cabernatch's book has not yet been written, but it is found quoted in several texts. It is considered the premier source for information on these beings.

The Association of Entities that Never Did Exist

"This meeting of TAENDE will now come to order!" Frederick Starbuck, the protagonist of a sci-fi novel that had had all copies destroyed, banged a not-gavel on a non-existent podium. "The Unnamed Child will read off the minutes of the last meeting."

The Unnamed Child, a character from a children's book that never existed, stood up. "First order of business at the last meeting was celebrating the passage of Cecil DeMuth into the realm of fiction; he was featured as an incidental character in a short story written by a college student." There was some polite applause. "Next, we discussed the matter of actively attempting to enter narratives, much in the same way Young Frederick did so many years ago. After that, the Tentacled Mass and President Starbuck debated the merits of cannibalism amongst Neverweres, and whether it should be banned entirely, or encouraged to get rid of threats to the non-existent community. Finally, we voted on whether or not the newest initiate in our group, Teleos, should be made a full member. The ayes had it. Welcome Teleos, Son of Hermes, God of Television!"

The Tentacled Mass screeched xer approval about finally having another deity on the Association. For some reason, despite never speaking, everyone understood it. Teleos, a young man with hair fashioned into a style reminiscent of an old rabbit ear antenna, simply blushed. "I'm humbled to be in such an association, really. I'd not heard of TAENDE before I stumbled into the not-room last week."

"We're glad to have you here on the Association of Entities that Never Did Exist, Teleos." Ivory Ebony smiled at him, flashing teeth that were half-white, half-black. "Tell us a little about yourself; the meeting ended before you got a proper introduction."

"Well, like the Unnamed Child said, I'm meant to be the son of Hermes, God of Communication. I was going to be worshiped by a group of Hermetic Revivalists in New York City, but the leader of the

cult died before he could write up anything about me. I've been one of our kind for about… seven Earth years, now." Teleos sighed, and sniffed a bit. "I never existed, and I probably never will exist."

"And how does that make you feel, Teleos?" Starbuck asked.

"Honestly? Pretty damn bitter. It's not fair that my creator died before he got a chance to write a single word about me. Now, I'm condemned to wander the Ways for the rest of eternity, unless someone somehow inserts me into a narrative."

The Tentacled Mass screeched. "How did I find this place? I just stumbled into here one day, and found the meeting in session. It's quite nice here, really, compared to some other parts of the Ways."

"Well, I'm glad you like it!" Sokarth Haaar, King of the Solar City of M'gwa and treasurer of TAENDE, smiled at Teleos. "How do you like the Concepts of Beverages?"

"They go quite well with the non-existent doughnuts, I must say." Everyone in the room chuckled; there were only 10 Neverwere in the association, some of them humanoid, but most of them were… something else. Sokarth Haaar was a being made entirely out of plasma, and the aforementioned Tentacled Mass was just that: a Tentacled Mass dreamed up by either Lovecraft or one of his contemporaries (there was debate over which it was) that had not been committed to paper before the author had died.

"Anyway. The cult I was meant to be worshiped by," Teleos continued, "Was lead by a man named Trevor Sonatina. He'd become obsessed with Greek mythology, particularly the myths involving the god Hermes. He was convinced that Hermes was the only Olympian that had survived into the modern day because, as god of messengers, he was able to thrive on all the communications technology in the modern world."

"I nearly met Hermes, once." Everyone in the not-room but Teleos groaned; Ivory Ebony loved to brag about mythological beings and famous figures she "almost met." "I saw the back of his head as he came out of the Library, once." The ball of tentacles screeched in response. "It's true! I did!" More screeching from the writhing mass.

"Moving on… shall we recite the oath?"

"Indeed!" Starbuck lead the other Neverweres in the oath of TAENDE. "We are ideas without form. We are not much better than chaos. We Never Were, and Never Will Be. We will govern this chaos, even if we are not heard. We are the Association of Entities that Never Did Exist, and we are order amongst the Neverwere."

"The first item on the agenda," said the Unnamed Child, "Is the fact that an increasingly large amount of members from the group that the Library calls the Bookburners are using the ways, and attempting to destroy Neverweres. What shall our course of action be?"

"We shall now take a short recess." Starbuck banged the not-gavel, and everyone got up. Ivory started talking to the Tentacled Mass, who had some less-than-nice things to say about Ivory; they had started a bit of a shouting match when the topic of Eldritch Deities came up.

"Shove it up… do you even have an ass? If so, shove it up there, Hentai-Brain!" Ivory slapped the Mass across what she thought was the face.

The Unnamed Child looked at Ivory. "What's 'hentai'?"

Ivory blinked, and cursed to herself. Turning around, she said in a sweet tone, "You're too young to know that, sweetie." She smiled innocently, and patted her on the head.

"I'm older than you! I've been around since the 1950's; I've just never been published. Don't be patronizing, you bi-colored hag!"

"If you're so old, why don't you-"

"Calm down!" Starbuck aimed a laser pistol up into the air (if directions such as "up" could apply here) "We're all non-existent here, we're all on equal terms…" The bickering continued. Starbuck fired off a couple of shots to no effect, and then tried to separate the two bickering not-entities.

Teleos sat in his chair and sighed, drumming his fingers against the not-table. Why were Neverwere so petty? He looked around the not-room and- hello, was that a wall? It was… and it had a gigantic number "4" on it. "What on Earth?" Walking around the commotion, he went up to the wall and tapped on it. A brick came loose, and on the other side, he saw-

"Son of a bitch! Everyone, shut up for a second!" The bickering continued. "I said shut up!" It went on; Ivory threw a punch at Sokarth, who had gotten involved due to Starbuck saying something nasty about plasmoid beings, and Teleos had to duck under a flying concept of a chair. Finally, at the top of his lungs, Teleos bellowed,"I MAY NOT EXIST, BUT I AM STILL A GOD, AND I COMMAND YOU ALL TO STOP!" Everyone stopped dead in their tracks and stared at Teleos.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked the Unnamed Child.

"Someone's writing about us. Or has written about us," the Tentacled Mass screeched at the Not-God. "I can feel it. And… since someone's writing about us…"

Ivory stared, her jaw dropping. "…my god. We… we exist!"

"Maybe you do," said an incidental character in the corner who had not yet been mentioned in the narrative. "I haven't even gotten a name yet."

"Well, you were just mentioned, so there's that!" Teleos smiled. "Hold on. There are 10 of us here. How many of us have been named?"

"Um…" Starbuck counted on his fingers. "There's me, Ivory, Sokarth, you, the Unnamed Child, the character in the corner… oh, and Cthulhu's hairball." The tentacled mass screeched. "What? It's a name, isn't it? That leaves three that still haven't been mentioned in the narrative…"

"Well, it's not like they can do anything," reasoned the Unnamed Child. "If they attack us, they'll be mentioned in the narrative, and therefore, will exist."

…ow. The metafiction levels of this story are making my brain hurt. Dial it back a bit, guys? "Screw you, narrator!" shouted an eighth character, plucked from a fanfiction that would never be written, and with good reason; it was quite horrible. "It could've been quality if it hadn't been based off of Doctor Who!"

"That just leaves me," expounded a stout gentleman with a boiler hat, "and whoever this tenth fellow is."

"ME?" said the tenth individual. "I AM NO ONE. I AM A NEVERWERE." Everyone stared at the 10th individual, who was, quite simply… I can't say he was indescribable, because that would mean he had a description. "YOU ARE ALL NEVERWERE."

"Hold it, though." Teleos pointed up to the previous line of dialog. "How can you be a Neverwere if you were mentioned in the story? That just makes you a "Were"."

The Neverwere gave a cry, and disappeared in a poof of logic. Starbuck frowned. "Well, that settles that, I guess. Now what?"

"Now, I say we get some actual beverages instead of just concepts of them. And doughnuts." The incidental character smiled. "I've always wanted to try an actual doughnut."

The nine remaining walked out of the now-actualized room, through the Ways, and towards the Library.

Don't Exist: A Sestina to a Fossil

Don't Exist: A Sestina to a Fossil

In the painlessness haze of opium
Mary lay in bed staring at a lithograph on
the floor. A plesiosaur skeleton. Once hers. Now nailed to the wall
of a museum. The cold crept through her blanket
slithering through the closed windows. And Amon
was there among the forgotten curios.

He stood there a curiosity among curiosities
The knickknacks collected dust. Maybe it was just the opium.
Lovingly scanning the empty shells and skulls Amon
said “This is a lovely find.” She kept on
as she was, still curled under the blanket,
infantile. “There’s nothing there,” she said, “Just the creaking of the wall.

Just the creaking of the wall and the wail
of March's winds,” The museum empty of its prizes. The curator
remained; she clutched the blanket
as her life ebbed out, soothed by the tincture of opium’s
quiet numbness. She remembered the plesiosaur found on
the sea shore among the ammonites.

She looked at the man again. He grew curled ram’s horns. Amon
knelt down beside her. “All of your life you chipped at a wall,
poor woman, never stopping.” What is he on
about? She thought in the haze. My life’s work has been

a curiosity
for the gentry and gossipers. They used me. The tincture of opium
sat on the table, reflecting the dunes of blanket.

“Don’t think like that. The animals that blanketed
the old Earth with their remains will be remembered,” Amon
said, “The diggers remembered in myth,” Her heart slowed its oscillations,
calming her tumor-nestled chest. The dead sat on the wall
staring down at their captor who would join them before cure
or treatment. "Don’t taunt a dying woman, you’re having me on."

He turned away. The horns on
his head disrupted the dust blanketing
the shelves. Hundreds of unsold crusts
and coprolites sat clean. Seeking amnesty
for grave robbing she sighed. Her eyes walled
shut. Where is that opium?

Ammonites are cured on the bottoms of shallow seas
and become Amon.
A woman sells seashells on the seashore and runs into a wall.
The neighbors come, remark on the opium and wrap her in final blankets

---

"She sells seashells by the seashore.
The shells she sells are surely seashells.
So if she sells shells on the seashore,
I'm sure she sells seashore shells."
People in nursery rhymes don't exist. Did they ever?

Hidden Corners Of Places

Features: Travel

A'kal the Wandering Wayfinder
The United States
Date: 12/17/2013

On the Hidden Corners of Places: A Travel*blog*

I'd been meaning to undertake this project ever since the disastrous "liveblogging" travel-a-thon across solar corona. I'm not sure if I made this abundantly clear at the time (the solar wind was a touch difficult to astrally project through) but travel there is stressful at best to carbon-based life. I would only recommenced it to a spicily seasoned traveler. What's that? I haven't mentioned this project? Well fear not dear readers; A'kal is a merciful chronicler.

Since I've had my fill of the physical and the **`editorial staff`** has put

their collective foot down on an expensive or esoterically intensive endeavor I've decided to embark on an emotional excursion. This next trip is to a place that is not exactly a place, it's a state. Deep down under the ripples generated by conscious minds on memespace is a place where the shadows of ideas form, a place of emotional ripples and echos, a place of mood, a place of the fourth primary colour.

Where and How:

In my profession we call this "The Hidden Place" or "The Hidden Corners of Places" because they are fairly unobtrusive but nearly as ubiquitous as corners. You can get there by taking a short walk with an empty mind. Enter your meditative state of choice (or blank your .temp files) and move in whatever direction you please. Keep your eyes open (a good **`wayfinder`** keeps safety first) and let them settle. Chances are you'll have reached a universal wobble. Mark down the location for later use and return with a thematically appropriate passport (change

for a vending machine, water for the thirsty, a tender hand for the stricken etc). Activate your passport toss a handful of salt at the nearest invertebrate (any variety aside from table salt will do) and then re-open them and you'll be there. Be sure to take a bag with you; travel light because there is no guarantee that your Hidden Place will have luggage service. While in a Hidden Place you can choose to ignore exhaustion, hunger or other physical symptoms of travel but you cannot travel faster than your walking pace or ignore the dominant sensations of the Corner so it's best to plan accordingly.

Things to Do:
Hidden Corners are flush with variety. Some are entirely visual, a symphony of images, colors and patterns to delight and confuse the sighted. Others are quiet and contemplative, dwelling on the **`inner lives of extroverts`**. I've been to one that consisted only of a lemon wedge, an uncharacteristically *stained* stainless steel floor and a note that said "good luck :(". Your Hidden Corner will form in response to the way that

the emotions in your region resonate, the way that memes proliferate and the cultural context of the wayfinder's upbringing. Bear in mind that events may occur in such a way as to violate causality. No matter where you go you'll have something to do so it's best to keep an open mind.

Accommodations:
Hidden Corners can intersect with well-traveled Ways. At such junctions you may find waystations[1] to accommodate you. As I outlined earlier this is a mental trip and not a physical one so physical needs only exist insomuch as you want them to. This of course leads us to:

Safety:[2]
Under no circumstances should you sleep in a Hidden Corner as doing so will invite the Unnamed or the Neverwhere into your psyche. If you don't want to spend the remainder of your existence screaming while marinating in your own juices then Don't sleep outside of a waystation. Remember that it's possible to avoid sleeping in a Hidden Corner for as long as you deem

appropriate.

As always I'll be posting a photo gallery of my experiences as I travel (I know that's the reason you follow me; it's clearly not for my prose). You can follow me on TheShambles, Flastula or here on **`Planasthai`**. Happy Traveling[3].

~A'kal

Footnotes

1. See the Planasthai Online Guide to Travel at www.plansathai.com
2. Safety Warnings are posted as a courtesy. Please consult literature on the Hidden Corners or any other destination outlined in this series. Planasthai is not liable for any damages you may suffer while traveling.
3. Hosted by Planasthai.com/blogs: Your source for bite-sized, vapid reporting.

Of the Nameless One

I come and I go
As I want and I please
You will never know
How tightly these coils squeeze [1]

There have been, in the history of the Library, only a handful of those who turn from us. Most recently, the one named the Great Betrayer has fled our halls and gone into hiding. However, the first will always be the most memorable, ironically enough. The Nameless One betrayed the Library when he allowed a small force of creatures into it, ensnared by his charms, attempting to penetrate unto the deepest vaults for reasons unknown. Before this, he was a well-regarded scholar of our lore and charms, one of the greatest historians of the Library.

In reprisal, the first ones opened each book containing his name and struck it from the text, removing it even from their memories and the memories of all those around him, and rendered him nameless, stripping him of the majority of his power. However, he has somehow persisted through time, and he continues to doggedly pursue his goals. He is best left as he is, though—**`forgotten`** . Those encountering him are advised to flee.

> " *It is said that there were once three keys* [2] *to the doors, and that the first one was always carried by the Librarian, and the other two were given to the most trusted, to open the doors and lock them as necessary from those who knew the ways but were not welcomed. It did not take long, in the memories of the living, to forget those secret ways, for they were greedy with their knowledge and unable to remember clearly those knowledges which are written in their very blood. The Librarian still keeps his key, in case of a great enough emergency that the doors must be sealed, and the other is held by the Jailors, who blessedly know not its power.* [TEXT OBSCURED] [3] *The third is best not spoken of.* [4] " –The Paths and the Ways, [Original Author Lost] [5]

1: This verse was found scrawled on the inner side of a Library door that had not been seen in centuries. The door itself was sealed, only to be found open again several months later. How this happened is still unknown,

though currently, the defacement is attributed to the Nameless One.
2: These keys are believed to be metaphorical. No information is known about a physical key, though it calls into question whether the one "held by the Jailors" is truly metaphorical, physical, or merely a form of knowledge.
3: The text following was removed from the page by unknown means. Anyone looking at it sees words, but they are obscured, nonsensical, and change with the reader.
4: At the end of the obscured text, this line always appears, in careful handwriting. A comparison of this handwriting to that scrawled on the unused door showed that the two did not match.
5: Tradition states that this text was originally written by **Harlequin**, who is still well known and well regarded from other texts.

Harlequin Skin

I am rare. Unique. Not quite one of a kind, but one of a mere handful. I am a Harlequin.

And I am going to die.

As with many, The Grand Opening changed everything. I was reborn. I became more than my brothers, more than my sisters ever could dream. Amongst the Norms, I stood out. Amongst the Clowns, I stood out. I refused to be counted amongst the rest of the Changed. Those who awoke to find themselves, Clowns, Tamers, or Freaks. I was not a deceitful Trickster nor a Knife-Thrower, I became something greater than a Clown. Pure white skin etched with striking diamonds. I had no second face or need of a false nose. My hair became sleekest black, straight and long. I was a Queen.

And I found myself a King.

Harlequins are a rarity amongst the Changed. Our gifts, like our Clown-brethren allow for new skin and indestructibility, however we are granted the added advantage of flexibility. To leap and tumble with such effortless grace was a boon that was ours and ours alone. My king was the greatest, my king could fly. The Clown Prince, he called himself. He was the first to claim his own kingdom in this new world, and I was there with him. When the rest turned their back on us, he was there. Welcoming with open arms, "Come, you have been reborn! Join me and claim your own thrones!" And life was good. We travelled the country, a mobile court of a hundred carriages and cars. With my king and I at the front, leading our people to where ever we may choose.

We stood against normalcy, we crossed deserts fighting with militias, soldiers and others who would demand we give in our nomadic ways and 'register'. "We shall do no such thing!" Claimed my king, "We are proud of our new selves and will not submit to those who cling to the old ways!" I loved him for that. So did we all.

Word spread and our kingdom grew. We easily began to rival towns in size and number. Although, misfortune followed our growth.

We began having to fend off raiders. Men, Norm or otherwise who came to claim our spoils as their own. Our Fantastic Beasts, hunted for their bones and pelts. Seers, for their wisdom and even my beloved king, whose own skin was coveted by most who knew the value. The nights became longer as attacks became more frequent, it was impossible to settle anywhere for more than a day. More bounty hunters and bandits learned of our existence. And one fateful night, I was captured.

The alarm was raised too late to do anything. Our lookouts had been killed by snipers and their wagons smashed our gates. Panic rose and fires spread, black smoke billowing into the orange night. We were being escorted to vehicles, my entourage and I, my king at the other side of the encampment leading our defence. I never saw him again. Men ambushed us, I screamed too late. Hands and ropes covered me and then the world became dark again.

I miss the night. I have been kept here for a week now. The laughter of my captors keeps me awake most nights, others I merely cry for my king until sleep takes hold. They have yet to kill me. There is no signal for them to advertise their wares. I pray that my king, my Clown Prince comes for me before then…

Items For Sale

Thundercattle Front Horn
Harvested from fresh adult Thundercattle, the front horns are stronger than steel. Perfect for foundation support and a variety of other uses. $250 per horn or $600 for a pair.

Thundercattle Hide
Small bus worth of Sq. Ft. Real Untreated Thundercattle Hide. $50-$100 per sq.ft.

Modified Land Rover
Raised suspension, roll cage, 4-Wheel Drive. $1,500 ono. Comes with chest of lubricants and contraceptives. Faulty handbrake.

Harlequin Skin
Extremely rare. White, blue/yellow diamond pattern covering

shoulder blades and navel area. $500,000,000.

Of the Remnant

We are gone, ***we are forgotten****,*
We lords of ancient worlds*,*
The prayers and orations are
Only stories to our children now.
Once we were the kings of glory,
And now we are but memories.
The Remnants of a better time. [1]

The cast off gods, drifters, and vagabonds from worlds that have moved on to other things. Living nightmares and forgotten divinities joined together by a single purpose: being remembered. Most of these creatures believe that if they add a book to the Library telling of their life, belief system, or power, they will achieve immortality. While this is true after a fashion [2], most fade away during the writing, as they come to the Library only when at their most desperate. [3]

A small legion of these beings joined together at one point [4], calling themselves the Remnants, professing that they would believe in each other to achieve their goals. [5] Occasionally, a deity long thought dead will be seen wandering through the aisles of the Library, searching for their holy book to remind themselves of who they once were. Often, these beings are recruited by the Remnant, who take them to some place deep beyond the Ways for reasons unknown. [6]

> *"A place where you can continue and live for as long as you wish, with others of your own kind of understand the pain you're feeling. You need not fade into shadows and be lost, only to be dragged from your grave whenever an archaeologist recites a prayer or a child sees your name in a book of myths. We will remember you, just as you will remember us."* –Nergal, Envoy of the Remnant [7]

1: This inscription was found on a marker deep in the Ways by Sophotic Farscrier, a diviner of potent accuracy whose soul vanished shortly after attempting to follow the further directions on it.

2: What could be more enduring and immortal than the written word? -L.S.

3: For a fairly accurate, though painfully dry, examination of gods and their substance, consider the perennial *Days of Ishtar*, the surprisingly analytical diary of the Mesopotamian love goddess. Additionally, an excellent text on the generation of species.

4: The exact date is difficult to determine due to the presence of several timelines overlapping at the meeting.

5: The belief of a god is a capricious thing, but the endurance of several beings who are no longer actively

followed on any world is a fascinating occurrence worthy of further examination.
6: While many have attempted to find the location of what other wanderers have called "The God's Hold," none have so far done so. A collection of the adventures of several explorers and searchers is collected currently in the west wing, under the Divinities section.
7: The being that was addressed was believed to be Viracocha, but the shade was so exceptionally faded that it is unknown exactly whom Nergal was addressing.

We Are Forgotten

The Earth is strange to me.
Why is the air so thin?
Where are the forests of horsetails?

Huge creatures,
covered in hideous offal,
Roam the landscape.

Ice covers the poles,
Our cousins work as one,
Visiting brightly colored… things.

And monsters—
Monsters that wear other skins—
Rule over all.

My children—
Where are they?
What has happened to them?

My children—
They were giants,
But now *their* children…

They are but dwarves!
Crushed under the feet of monsters!
You spare them no second thought!

They were glorious once.
Once they crushed monsters,
And spared *you* no second thought.

Why can't any of you,
Not even a single one,
See me?

Are you all blind?
Or…
Am I even here?

You have forgotten my children,
Despite your words,
And in spite of your books.

Do you even know we are gone?
Everything's so different…
Maybe…

Maybe none of us have a place here.

Maybe it is best that we are forgotten.

We Lords Of Ancient Worlds

> It is the fate of gods to conduct the universe. Heaven help them.

Every god has the grounding force in nature, they do not control every aspect of the universe. There are the lesser gods, who are delegated power by the greater. Born of heroes' souls and the clay of earth, these deities are no less worthy of our respect.

The first lesser gods were created by Thanos, god of thunder. As the new ages came to him, bringing more and more electronic devices, the time and work required to run the universe became overwhelming. One day, while knitting the lightning for the world, he dropped an electrical socket to earth.

As it fell from heaven, it took on massive heat, becoming a pure blazing sun streaking through the sky. When it impacted, it could be felt even by the pantheon of the gods. Continents buckled and shattered, lakes boiled, and mountains crumbled to clay.

But, when Thanos looked down upon his folly, he saw life within this socket. It had taken on the appearance of man, with his corporeal form and foibles. When he investigated closer, he found this new being had been granted a sliver of his power, and could wield influence for him in the world.

Thus, Thanos set to creating his children, the lesser gods of lightning and static. They carried his will, thoughts, and deeds to man, allowing an explosion of technological thought and progress. What had once been limited by the time of one god now flourished under the cooperation of many.

His first son, Alixes, could command the force of lightning from heaven. From his position atop the clouds, he tossed bolts to the ground indiscriminately, striking down all he surveyed. But this warlike attitude was not all he was capable of. The mastery of

lighting allowed him to see all the world for an instant, as the bolt hit the ground. He saw every face, and every home.

Diates was the second child. As his father had given the elder brother command of lightning, there was not much left for Diates to accomplish. Static electricity, while powerful in great numbers, was mostly used for simple random encounters with man. Despite the mundane lot he had in life, Diantes embraced it, acting responsibly and faithfully to his task.

Other lesser gods followed in their wake. Masters of steel. Lords of battleships and submersibles, of factories and aircraft. More modern tools came of age, and with them came an insurgence of gods splitting power. With each new god came more efficiency in the realm of mankind. Limits were cast aside, and they progressed to dizzying technological and cultural heights

As the splits continued, many of the gods were pleased with themselves. They had brought about the greatest technological and cultural revolution of any age. Surely, nothing could damage them now. But, as fate would soon show, when faith is split from great forces, the power is dulled.

> Lo, I beheld a great chasm, and bursting from within this chasm wast Feys, lord of underworld. He had beheld the chaos and violence of gods, and hastened to prevent their fall. He was too late.

If the gods had been a uniting force, the lesser gods may have existed in perpetuity, being split with every new mechanism devised by mankind. But, with every split, the power and security of the greater gods weakened. No longer to incorporate as mere forces, they saw their weakened brothers as a chance to seize greater power for themselves.

The first act came from Thanos, who had perpetuated the lesser gods before any other. For many years, Thanos had been jealous and resentful towards his older brother, Orfus, god of all sounds. Thanos felt that since a bolt of lightning created the sound of thunder, he should be the one in control of both. Orfus disagreed, and the two had feuded over it since the first bolt struck the sand to

create man.

With this new, modern world, there was a cacophany of sound which had to be created. Orfus had cast down more delegates than any other deity, and suffered for it. Unable to take on incorporeal form, he clung to his remaining power as he was spread thinner and thinner.

One day, his brother Thanos came to his palace, asking for audience to discuss easing Orfus' burden. Eager for relief, he allowed Thanos entry, and invited him for dinner. Under the sound of clinking forks and pouring wine, Thanos pried for information about the situation Orfus had been thrust into. Before the second course could arrive, Thanos cast aside his pretense of civility, and swallowed his brother whole.

It was a dangerous precedent. Soon, every god was coming to consolidate the power of their brothers. Gods of nature consumed each other, gaining greater power but wrecking the seasons. This soon threw the forces of nature into conflict, as spring led to winter, birds took to the sea, men married their pets. The land was awashed in hysteria.

Soon, the seas began to rise, and the earth cracked. Underworld was bursting with the souls of dead men and gods, and they could be contained no longer. When the feuding in heaven had reached its climax, they obliteraed the gates and stormed the universe, breaking every natural being. The gods, bloated and unable to function, perished. It seemed as though Thanos' folly had brought the end times.

But, the seas retreated. Man still lived. Even with the greater gods wiped out, those who had assumed their duties remained. Even with forces of chaos and anarchy in the universe, man would be able to start again. So, life went on. Cities were rebuilt, and new civilizations were formed.

> We must keep the lands safe from fear. We cannot go back to the way things were, so we must press onwards, anew. Nobody will come to save us, so know that you respond only to yourself. Bind yourself to your task, and

never waver.

Gyros, lord of caverns.

Of the Magpies

One for sorrow,
Two for mirth
Three for a funeral,
Four for birth
Five for your wings,
Six for your beak;
Seven for a secret,
Never to speak. [1]

The Magpies refer to themselves as “Collectors,” and while they bear superficial similarities to the Jailors, they are a less powerful yet more annoying threat, due directly to their ability to navigate the ways. [2] The Magpies have let themselves into the Library several times, looking for tomes or documents. More rarely, they approach wanderers in an attempt to coerce them into aiding them in procuring things. [3]

Currently, there is neither rhyme nor reason to the things they seem to be searching for, and while various Magpies have been captured coming into or leaving the Library, countless others have absconded successfully with tomes or artifacts. [4] Previous investigations into their nature have turned up nothing, and the Second Archivist [5] named them “Magpies,” because they seemed to grab at only the “shiny” things they saw, regardless of value. Current thinking regards the Magpies as more of a nuisance than anything.

> *"Always address th' Magpies with respect, but don' be afraid to cross yourself neither. Bow t' them. If they walk over to ya, pinch yorself, so ya know y'aint dreamin', then cross yor thumbs and hold it up to 'em an say 'Defil, Defil, I defy thee!' three times! And don't ya never, never let 'em touch ya or follow ya home!"* —Cormellian Nicodemus Shank

1: Earliest extant version of “One for Sorrow,” circa 1498.
2: The Magpies apparently navigate through natural means, and the mechanism they use to do so is entirely unknown.
3: Several books have been written on the adventures the Magpies have sent people on, and a full list of them is recorded in the Southern Deep Wing.
4: A full list of books believed to have been stolen by the Magpies is maintained by the current Archivist.

5: Caduale Mezerizo, the shortest serving archivist, who died in his sleep the first time he allowed himself to rest.

Of the Madmen

twisting fires burning
burning
burning
my eyes were
burning
they burned me
made me listen
made my obey
help me please [1]

The Madmen first appeared in the Ways at the beginning of the last century. At first, they were welcomed to the Library, as we believed them to be the foretold coming of the new wanderers, but quickly, we discovered our mistake. They were not as they seemed, and when we discovered how closely akin to the Jailors they were, we acted with haste to bar them. Today, they still wander the ways through some unknown method, sometimes attempting to regain entry. Twice they have done so, each time causing great damage. Once, they took advantage of the Great Searing to gain entry, and the second time, they had a young wanderer with them who had been broken and vivisected into obedience.

Currently, we do not fully understand their motivations or their goals, save that those who have been rescued from their clutches [2] refer to them as Sowers of Discord or The Insurgency. They seem to use devices and tools which they do not divine the full ramifications of, including living beings. [3] For this reason, the Madmen are to be dogged and tracked as best as possible, for they are willing to rip the world asunder for their strange desires.

> *“Ye know me, Elias, I’d have decked him then and there if it weren’t for that little lass he had on the leash! He was tuggin’ her about and havin’ her look at things to tell him when they’d die or disappear. I swear now, if it weren’t for the fact that her life was in danger, I’d have decked him right there, but I wasn’t gonna risk letting her get hurt, nosiree! Nosiree!”*

“What did I do? Well, I waited ‘til he weren’t lookin’, and I turned myself into a pen knife and laid myself at her feet. Hehe… Sweet little thing knew just were to put it too.”

—From Cordany Wood’s “Madmen Bleed Better” [4]

1: This piece of ‘found verse’ was organized into its current format by Cordany Wood. They were originally the last words of a rescued victim of the Madmen, considered to have artistic merit.

2: Those rescued include many currently considered a part of The Serpent's Hand. Several of the ones that were too broken in mind or body to be helped were put into the hands of the Jailors or allowed to be killed by the Bookburners, all at the allowance of the Madmen. Given the danger of the Jailors, no rescue attempts are currently planned.

3: Interestingly enough, the Madmen seem to delight in the use of ancient weapons, especially the god's tool and holy implements of the divine.

4: Wood's stories are an oral tradition. Wood himself is available to recite them in the speakers ossuaries in the Third Archive.

Of the Daeva

We rise! Our age long sleep is now a memory of the distant past. We will strike down our jailers, and they will know that our revenge is complete! The Library shall burn! The books shall be consumed! And I will feast on the heart of the great keeper who watches over their books. An ending is coming. For we are written. [1]

It is a fairly simply, regular occurrence that reality changes books. Beowulf was changed by the Christian monks that rewrote it, for example, to justify its existence in their libraries. [2] The Daeva are a different situation entirely.

It is suspected that at some point, the Daeva were wanderers themselves, the cast-off **leavings of another world** that had died on some catastrophe or another, and that some of them reached the Library at its founding, as the Tale of Cornerstone confirms. However, at some point, they left the realities forever, leaving behind a book. [3] Unfortunately, this is not something that can be easily or simply verified, due to the very nature of the Daeva themselves.

The Daeva occupy a text which is continually in the process of writing itself. As it continues, references to it appear in other volumes, [4] though they do not appear in the memories of those old enough to remember the events themselves. [5] What is truly confounding is that the evidence of the Daeva appears to be writing itself into history as the volume continues to be written. Therefore, while texts mention them as wanderers from another world, there is no way to be certain.

What is certainly known is that the Daeva have a **vendetta** against the Library for reasons unknown, though it has been theorized that something about the magic of the place possibly threw them into their current condition. Various texts have

appeared, seemingly at random, telling of wars the Daeva fought against the Library and its denizens, though no record of such a war existed before. [6] Most worrisome is the possibility that these events will suddenly come into existence should the original text become complete.

> " *The blades of bone and flesh and ink slitted into his neck, and the Chief Archivist died, his eyes alone there to witness his own death, as all the others were blind. And as the new one's eyes grew bright again, so too were they dimmed by the blade. And one by one, they all fell, until there was silence in the Library. And then the sound of two hands clapping. 'So we meet again.'* " —Only known surviving excerpt from *The Victory of the Daevas* , Author Unknown [7]

1: Inscription from *The Legend of the Daeveas* . Author unknown.
2: Consider also Martin Swartling's *The Prince of Starfellows* or Jehova's *The Bible* .
3: While the dust jacket for the text is still kept, the book itself, *A Chronicle of the Daevas* , was lost ages ago. It is currently believed to be in the hands of the Merchants or the Jailors. While the former could be convinced to sell the text, the price would doubtless escalate if our interest is known. There are no plans to attempt to retrieve the book from the Jailors if they are the culprits.
4: For a full list of changes in footnotes and suddenly generated texts, consult *Legacy of the Daevas* , currently maintained by Antonius Typhon.
5: Scaramungia and Irad both claim no memory of the described beings.
6: Such events as 'The Slitting of the Gryphon's Throat' and 'The End of Faith' are noted to be the turning points in these battles, though both these beings are known to have served their terms admirably.
7: This fragment was found on a burned and damaged page in the First Archive. The name of the book is entirely unknown, this title having been ascribed to it by its discoverer. Further information is greatly sought.

Leavings Of Another World

Words have power.

Indeed, they have the power to create, but mostly they have the power to destroy. Does that really surprise you? Let me demonstrate. Please think of an animal, any animal. It could be anything, right? Two-legged? Four-legged? Winged? Anything. But, now suppose I said "Think of a quadruped". It can no longer be two-legged, can it? It can no longer be a bird or a fish. And if I said, "Think of a black, domesticated feline", your choices are narrower still. And finally, "Think of Bastet, my pet black cat"? At that point, you have no choices at all. You may believe that each step gives you more information, but what it really does is limit your imagination and destroy possibilities. The power to destroy, you see, is much greater than the power to create. You just didn't notice because you, yourself, are a creature of thoughts, ideas, language, and ultimately of words.

Suppose I told you there was once a world without language, without ideas, without words. Of course "world" itself is a word, so it wasn't really a world, but we have to call it something, now don't we?

In this world there were no limitations. Everything that could be, was. Everything that couldn't be, also was. It was a vast place of infinite complexity, but also of infinite simplicity. Since everything that was or wasn't, also was or wasn't everything else, the endless variety was in fact all the same. You say it's difficult to describe? Indeed, that's the point: It can't be described. It was everything and anything, and something and nothing, and all-at-once and not-at-all.

What happened to it? Words, of course. It started with a single, simple word, in a language that no one speaks anymore. No one knows where it came from or how it sounded, but I'll tell you what it meant. It meant "red", and as soon as there was "red" there was also "not-red". The world had been neatly cloven into red any-every-

somethings and not-red any-every-somethings. It was the first division, and the very idea of division spawned more ideas and more words: "one", "two", "separate", "together", "us", "them", and from these came more: many, many more.

As more words were created, more limitations took hold. Everything that was, had to be, and everything that wasn't, had to not be. The any-every-somethings could no longer be each other. They couldn't be anything or nothing. They had to be something, or they had to not be. Possibilities collapsed and ideas locked into place. It took less than a second for the entire world to come apart. Nothing was left, nothing except for Things: rocks, air, fire, water, light, darkness, love, hate, up, down… Things.

You're right: We still have all those things. In fact, our world is made from the wreckage of the world that came before, the world destroyed by words. Now I'll tell you a secret. I'm not promising that this part is true, but it's what some people say. A few of the any-every-somethings escaped the words. They avoided description and survived the death of their world. They're still around, some say, and probably not very happy.

What are they like? We can't really imagine, now can we?

Vendetta

I have gotten my revenge.

Ever since I'd been knocked from the highest cliff in the land, and left for dead on the cold, tile ground. But that wasn't my end. I'd not shattered on the ground, but bounced, preserving my life and igniting a hunger for revenge.

But, I am getting ahead of myself. I am Swolly Bodget, first order of the Steinberger family. We are a noble, semi-transparent people, who live in the great land of the Baer Family China Cabinet. Our family is of noble stature, taking high positions on the third and topmost shelf. We look down upon the silver spoons, wax sculptures, and various doodads and gee-haws. Of course, we have our detractors, in particular a competing noble family.

The Wineglassbergensteins occupy the shelf below us, and covet our precious top shelf spot. We, of course, held the top spot because of our complete status. Every one of our original components was intact, and we shimmered under the low glow of fluorescent lighting. The Wineglassbergensteins, on the other hand, had the misfortune of losing their second smallest tea tray.

Ever thirsting for power, the Wineglassbergensteins hatched a plot to end our reign. Their second largest teacup, known colloquially as "Ervin", hatched a plan to get the top spot by smashing one of our family members. But who, they asked, would be best for the task? They pondered, and piddered, they even went as far as pedaling, and eventually they decided on their target: Me. The smallest teacup in the family would be like taking a spoon from a wax baby hand.

So, when the lights were turned off, they seized me from my velvet-lined collectors edition bed, and hoisted me to the very top of the cabinet. I pleaded with them, telling them that the scuffs on their finishing work would disallow them entry to the coveted top space. But my pleas fell on deaf handles. They cast me from on high, down,

down to the unforgiving earth. But I did not shatter. I bounced, and as I did, I swore revenge.

The next morning, I was replaced in my casing, unscuffed and filled with shattering rage. These unpolished gangers were no better than common Dixie cups! They would suffer like one too. I plotted for many nights, with my associates Billy the teaspoon and Reginald T. Sugarcubeholder. We decided that for their crimes, the whole family of Wineglassbergenstein would suffer our wrath. They would look up, and cry, "what light, through yonder Solo breaks?"

We stealthily hopped to their home in the last night of the week, and began our glorious master revenge plan of infinite justice and destruction. We snuck into their camp, and loosened every screw on the wooden platform which held them aloft. Then, in the lower, urban, knickknack wasteland that was the bottom shelf, we threw this pamphlet down.

> **PEOPLE OF THE LOWER SHELF**
>
> WE, THE LOVING AND KIND WINEGLASSBERGENSTEIN FAMILY, HAVE CREATED A FUN ACTIVITY GATHERING FOR ALL WALKS OF DOODAD! JOIN THE FINEST OF CHINA, AS WE CELEBRATE UNITY AND HOW COOL WE ARE
>
> CAKE AND PUNCH WILL BE SERVED FROM US

From here, we waited. When daylight broke, the low waking sounds of the bottom tier were swiftly replaced with excited squeals. There was a stampede of trinkets and thingamajiggers rushing up to the second floor, eager for spoils. Confused, the foolhardy Wineglassbergensteins were overwhelmed by the sheer number of doohickeys storming their gates.

There was a creaking

Then silence.

A great, calamitous sound rang out, crashing, splintering and shattering alike.

Silence reigned again.

Since then, there hasn't been a sound from what used to be the lower floors. We have gotten our revenge, and remain the ruling set of the cabinet. All those who would oppose us, and those we ruled, have been smashed to smithereens. There are those among our camp who think that they all deserved it, and our survival was predetermined. Others say that we acted with too much haste, and lost everything that gave us power.

But, in the coming months, things would indeed change. New shelves were installed, new trinkets and antiques placed upon them. They were cold, unconversational types, who never spoke or moved. We pine for the days before, when we could have rivalries and fights, some excitement. But none of that is here, and really, did we ever have any power? The things we presided over were no great feats. This was merely a return to what should have been all along.

In the end, we were only cups.

Of the "Serpent's Hand"

Serpent, Serpent,
Back again?
Bring your sister.
Bring your friend!
Serpent, Serpent,
How long you'll last?
You've come again,
And you will pass. [1]

The Serpent's Hand is the most recent group of **wanderers** to take it upon themselves to defend the Library, using it as a base of operations for their wanderings in the worlds they find throughout the Ways. Currently, the Hand's numbers total almost two-hundred, the lion's share of which have been plucked from the grasp of the Jailors, the Madmen, or various other, unimportant groups.

They are, much like those who have come before them, largely superfluous. The Library has always been, and it will continue to endure, in spite of all ill attempts and searings and those who would attempt to destroy it. [2] They are unneeded, but we welcome them, just like we welcome all lost tomes.

> " *And so, I, the last defender of the Library, am forced to lay down my sword and surrender to those who would attempt to end us. I have spent my entire life defending this magical realm, and now, I go to my last, mourning for its death. Without us to save it, how long can such a place endure?* "
> —Torvo Priory [3]

1: From the 1833 handwritten *Book of Omens and Fortellings* , Mary Manori, age nine.
2: For a full list of attempts to destroy the Library, the Fifth Archive is available. Access to the Fifth Archive is restricted to those given permission by the current archivist.
3: The Last Member of the Brotherhood of Alchemists, 1644.

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